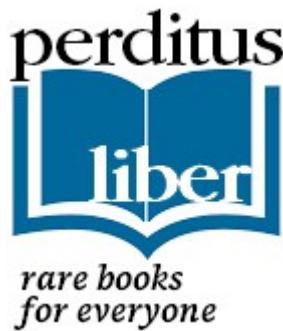


# THE DARK CHAMBER



Clifford Pyle

LEONARD · CLINE



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## **The Dark Chamber**

by

Leonard Cline

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## THE DARK CHAMBER

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*God Head*

MCMXXV

*Listen, Moon!*

MCMXXVI

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THE  
DARK CHAMBER

BY

LEONARD CLINE



NEW YORK · THE VIKING PRESS · MCMXXVII

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*For*  
CAROL AND GARTH HYATT  
*song and garden*  
*so beautiful together*  
*to Katharine and Leonard*

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PART I: JANET

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## JANET

- 1 -

Yesterday had been summer in the city, the end of summer stale and jaded, with a dejection in the air that dragged like an old skirt in the gutter. Tonight in this loneliness of woods and stars high on the Palisades above the Hudson it was brisk autumn. Rested already in the loose comfort of my pajamas I threw up the ponderous window. Midnight gushed in, tripping up the yellow flame of the candle on the dresser, which wrestled gallantly with the dark invader, until in every comer of the lofty wainscoted chamber shadows hunched and reared and panted waiting their moment to pounce.

And for a few minutes I lingered at the window exulting in that gush of cool night, the fresh cleanliness of it on my naked throat and ankles, and in the quietude broken only by the rustle of drying leaves on oak and hickory, so very quiet after all August in a stifling closet beside the elevated. But from three hills away came suddenly a baying; and I remembered the huge dog Tod, coal-black *Deutscher hund* whose snarl sinister as his name had been my first greeting to Mordance Hall that afternoon.

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Now all we need, I thought, is the sound of horses galloping around and around this ruinous place, and not a horse to be seen. For that is a tradition of haunted houses. And Mordance Hall, from the broken flags green with lichen of its crumbling terrace to the time-stained panelwork of the seigniorial hall that rose three floors to a dusky skylight, would convince the most skeptical. The sound of galloping horses, and perhaps a phosphorescent face drifting pinched and stricken through the night; and perhaps just now a cry.

Shivering suddenly I turned from the window and surveyed the chamber in which for the winter at least I was like to dwell. In the light of the one taper, as it bent and twisted in the wind, the lines of the room wavered into queer angles and slants, and darkness crouched behind tall wardrobe and wide poster-bed, armchair and table. Half to the ceiling the walnut wainscot mounted, and in each corner were wood pilasters supporting the crenellated molding. From an elaborate oval relief in the middle of the ceiling hung an

antique chandelier of glittering glass. But there was no gas in the empty pipes, and fixtures for electricity had never been installed in any part of the house. It was an idiosyncrasy of Richard Pride's—lord of the place and my patron—that he could tolerate only the mild light of candles.

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I had been very tired when I came upstairs to bed. Now with the bay of the dog still in my ears I was stark awake. I took the candle from the dresser and crept across the thick carpet to the bed and there I put it on a low table. With a voluptuousness of fatigue I let myself down into the soft pillows and lit a cigarette. Indeed this was a haunted place, strange people were here, and it had been the most fantastic peradventure that brought me to join them. And so far I knew no more than ever what service I, a maker of music, was expected to render in connection with those "experiments of a semi-scientific nature" upon which Richard Pride was engaged. I had not even met Mr. Pride, who had been called away unexpectedly and might not return to Mordance Hall for a week or more.

Wilfred Hough, his secretary, came to the Edgewater ferry to pick me up early in the afternoon. Surely he was no assuring spectacle. He was thin and stooping and soft-chinned and he spoke with a pathetic squeak. If there were ghosts at Mordance Hall they would never think to spook at him; they might mistake him in the dark for a distant cousin of theirs, I reflected, trying to remember him lightly. But he was so haggard, so drained ... and I could not help remembering a book I had been reading, a book on vampirism.... "Damn!" I said aloud,

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and I groped for something less suggestive to fasten my mind upon.

Fifteen miles we had driven north from Edge-water ... if it was not a dream, if I was not dreaming ... and twice we had turned, plunging into a stretch of forest that was quite virgin, sprawling estates with only a rough stone gate at intervals along the road to indicate, far back behind the trees, a human habitation. Through just such a gate at last we turned, and half a mile down a narrow sandy lane between pines and birches and squat gnarled hornbeams, wild country beautiful in its neglect, teeming with purple asters and great patches of scarlet ivy. Then we emerged from the fragrant shadow and crossed a small lawn and drew up at the porte-cochère of Mordance Hall, neglected as were the woods and seeming empty until

the great dog came challenging across the terrace. "Down, Tod!" commanded Hough. And Tod, without a glance at the secretary, as if recognizing the delegation of authority in this meeching famulus but contemptuous of its representative, did but sniff at my heels when I dismounted, with a little low thunder in his throat and his shoulders half bristling.

Tod. Death. What a forbidding name for a dog! and what a barghest for such a name! There is something grisly lurking always in the smallish eyes of a

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police dog, something disconcertingly swift and crafty and inimical. One feels it is no canine love or respect that keeps him from molesting one, but cunning; the beast is merely biding his time. There is no dog too that gives one such an apprehension of savage strength, and Tod among his kind would stand inches above the mightiest.

But Hough pulled open a massive door that creaked rustily on its hinges, and I stepped into the entrance hall, and there on the threshold I halted with amazement. It was an enormous apartment fifty feet from floor to ceiling, with the darkness little more than stained and made apparent by the red glow from a fireplace at the far end and the yellow of candles in two ancient iron girandoles one at each side of the door. A canvas by some drugged and dream-rid Fleming, pupil of Von Stück with the fierce superstitions of the seventeenth century in his blood, hung over the hearth; I discerned the whiteness of a twisted thigh and the stare of serpent's eyes from a deep bituminous background. Octagonal marble tiles fitted together without cement, loosening now after so many years and giving way here and there underheel, floored the room. At second and third story levels were balconies with heavy carved balustrades, and in one corner a door stood ajar.

Hushed with marveling at this legendary place I

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followed Hough up a broad stairway and around the first balcony to the door that hung open: this chamber in which now I lay. Fidgeting with an apology for them Hough touched match to candles. Then he left me alone, still mute and wondering....

The long table in the vast manorial dining-room was laid for four, with the richest of silver and the most opulent of linen, by the light of four tall tapers. So, with Hough making up the party, I met Mrs. Pride and her daughter Janet. It was music we talked about; hardly a word of Richard Pride, nothing of his researches although curiosity tantalized me. Miriam Pride had known New Orleans when the old French opera flourished; and Janet was familiar with Ravel and Stravinsky, but there would be a lecherous muted whine in her orchestration, I thought, watching her eyes. Skilfully, in a manner cordial and flattering and ostensibly incurious, Mrs. Pride directed the conversation until presently it was of my music we talked; of study in Europe, and of my studies there; and finally by a circuitous route of my family.

In the wide doorway lay Tod, muzzle on forepaws, ears pricking, yellow eyes fixed in a stare that seemed never to shift and yet always to follow the conversation from one speaker to another.

“Indeed, he is a magnificent dog,” I remarked.

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“But I think you might have chosen a more comfortable name for him. He’s terrifying enough just to look at. Will he ever make friends with me?”

Mrs. Pride laughed. “Tod is a peculiar animal. He makes friends with no one, very easily. He is Mr. Pride’s dog.”

“You’re to be congratulated if he recognizes you at all,” commented Janet. “He doesn’t even growl at me. He ignores me completely. He doesn’t seem to see me. Actually, he looks quite through me. Watch, when I speak to him.”

So I watched, and she spoke. “Tod!” she said sharply; and then with the most affectionate suasion, “Come Tod, good dog! Come on, Tod! Come here!” The hard eyes gleamed in the candlelight, level they stared at the girl, and I would have sworn they saw nothing. It was eerie ... and I was glad when Janet took the conversation over a row of hurdles and asked what I thought of astrology.

“Isaac Newton believed in it. So did Goethe,” she observed, frowning. “I don’t know ... but sometimes predictions are surprisingly accurate. My moon is a rover. I shall never amount to anything.”

I could laugh at astrology. Janet laughed too, although with a word of reservation, and Hough’s pale face was a ghostly smear of deferential mirth. Mrs. Pride did not laugh. She was one of those disturbing

people who never laugh at what seems ridiculous to others, never at a witticism or an absurdity. But now and then she would laugh all by herself at a commonplace statement of fact or opinion, a cynical laugh in which her eyes were angry and her mouth contemptuous; and one felt that she saw into deeper significances relative to some very personal, brooding and quite embittered experience of life.

Mrs. Pride could laugh at Tod, but I could not.... And lying now alone in my bed, with the candle guttering on the low table at the bedside and the cigarette cold in my fingers, I found myself musing upon an eldritch fancy indeed. For I thought, this is a haunted place, this manor of Mordance Hall. It is all under a spell; and the four of us who dined together tonight and the young negress who went about so silently serving us, we too are under a spell. Over woods and ruinous mansion, over lonely day and crawling night, falls the purpose of Richard Pride, who watches us and keeps us for unspeakable mysterious ends. And when the truth is finally told I shall never sit down with Richard Pride at dinner, because there is no Richard Pride; for Richard Pride and the great dog Tod are one and the same. It is he who is my master ... Lycanthropy. Werewolf, with yellow eyes....

Out of this reverie I clutched. The taper had spilled a puddle of wax and was far consumed. Without daring to glance again around that ancient chamber I blew out the light and resolutely shut my eyes....

- 2 -

Miriam Mordance Pride and her daughter, Janet.... Something of the mother, more of the girl, I saw during the three or four days after my coming to Mordance Hall. I found them fascinating each in her particular quality of passion and of frustration. Physically they resembled each other in their dark hair and small but delicately modelled stature, just as they did in the tragic intensity that churned sometimes in the depths of their eyes. But Miriam's was a more profound and a controlled torment which left her at least the manner of composure, festering at heart and saturnine in its bearing. While Janet's fretted and stung and expressed itself in a manic pathognomy of sharp laughter following hard on puzzled frown and a

restlessness that took her dizzily from mood to mood and interest to interest.

Yes. Miriam was a felled trunk whose core swirled with the coiling glow of phosphorus, but dun outside,

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giving no sign of that fire. And Janet was a hill by a marsh, frantic with the flitting of will-o'-the-wisps.

A year or two more than forty was Miriam Pride. Born in New Orleans, child of a creole mother and a father whose blood mingled elements of Hebrew with strains of French several generations removed from his ancestral Gascony, she had been gently reared and carefully educated. And she had aspired to a career on the stage, and had displayed precocious talent in some minor professional parts before Pride, much older than she, swept her into his arms after a vehement courtship. She never returned to her art.

Now in her venust prime she was a creature of lush loveliness, languid and yet aware of life with a keen and eager sensuality. She was a music to which a thwarting hand had written a profound and disturbing bass. And the voluptuous appeal of her was dignified by that patrician refinement, that alert pride which an admixture of Jewish blood so often contributes. It was she who had selected the queer canvas of Van Atter which hung over the hearth, and another of his that I discovered later, hidden away ...: a picture of an apocryphal Tyrolean saint of the middle ages, crucified, with one female breast very seductive, and a beard, and a golden slipper on

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one spiked foot, the other bare, before whom sat a minstrel playing on his *vièle*. It was she indeed who scrutinized the stars and foretold futures from them. She read Wilhelm Muller and the fantasies of Gustavo Adolfo Becquer in the original, and Baudelaire endlessly, and Eliphas Levy and those innumerable rhapsodies of Aleister Crowley, monstrous alike in erudition and obliquity. She seemed, in all her sensitive recognition of life, to hang suspended in a trance of horror.

Prodigious wilfulness was the impression Miriam made on me, and by the light of this her companionship with Wilfred Hough seemed very odd. For almost always, when she roused from a reverie or a book and strolled across the terrace toward the cliffs to the east or the woodsy ravines to the west, he would appear and fall into step at her side. In the house one would

come upon them at chess, Hough silent and puzzling, Miriam breaking her taciturnity only with an occasional sneer as she moved swiftly through his disconcerted defenses toward an inevitable checkmate. Surely there was some understanding between them, more than the merely casual companionship Miriam might have been expected to seek in this lonely place with the only person available, in the absence of Pride. Once bent on detecting them I could remark many a quick exchange of

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glances between the two. Not that there was ever in her expression any hint of tenderness or infatuation when she would look at Hough: that would have been preposterous; Miriam and this shilpit secretary! Conspiratorial rather was their meeting of eyes, with a trace of speculation in Miriam's and a cloud of anxiety in Hough's. And watching them, contrasting the abundant crimson of her moist lips with the sapped pallor of Hough's cheeks, I remembered the gruesome idea my first glimpse of the secretary had evoked....

Quite early Miriam retired, and not long afterward Hough took himself off. Yawning with the sleepy warmth of the ingleside Janet and I stepped out on the terrace and smoked a cigarette.

“Have you ever seen Mrs. Pride on the stage? I think she would be quite wonderful, in certain rôles. Elektra, or Salome.”

“Do you think so really?” Janet laughed. “You should tell her. She would be flattered and not at all interested. I rather hoped to go on the stage myself at one time. When I was in college.”

“And that gave her a vicarious satisfaction?”

“Not in the least. I played Mélisande and she never so much as wrote me a note about it. Much less come down to see the performance. But that was just as well because I met a painter and forgot Mélisande

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and made a terrible idiot of myself. So I relinquished my dreams of a theatrical triumph and decided to paint.”

Janet glanced at me with a pucker of lips that was not entirely amused. “I painted seven pictures and then I met a lawyer. So I read three chapters of Blackstone and then I met a landscape architect. He was really a nice boy and had a lot of talent. I brought him out here. Poor Philip! We got a tree half planted and then Tod decided he didn't like the improvement.”

... "Your father ..." I ventured. "I'm very curious."

"So, my dear Oscar, am I; and you are likely to be gratified sooner than I. My father is much like his dog. He can't seem to see me, even when I ask him for tribute. It's chilly. Let's talk of something pleasant. Will you teach me how to write music?" ...

Fire lighted and directed as yet to no end: that was Janet. She was song before it is fashioned: the fugitive suggestion of melodies before, selected and defined, they are woven together in the one conclusive pattern. She was a tingle of sweet flesh bewildered by the multiple potentialities of life. She was beautiful, and surely she could be tender. She was yet to be composed....

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- 3 -

In orpiment and filemot the pageant woods glowed in the luminous golden afternoon. My eyes made glad by so much color, my spirit jocund itself to watch the frolic lustihood of bird and squirrel life in the trees, I followed Hough down a path that clipped through a hollow northward from Mordance Hall. As we went over the farther crest the hickories thinned away and presently we emerged in a clearing.

This was a superb setting and for a moment I stood smitten by the glory of it. Sheer to the brink of the Palisades the woods were cropped off. There two hundred feet below swung the broad blue eare of the Hudson, and overpast him clustered the standing hills. This was a stage and it was built for giants. The curving woods were backdrop and that granite lip proscenium. And I felt suddenly very small and mean, for the hills were audience. How they must hold their sides and guffaw to see such cockchafer heroes step thus out of the wings! But no, they gave no sign of seeing us at all. They are regarding, I mused, the afternoon: he kneels here now in prayer, that young knight, and soon the sunset will slay him, and the evening steal to his side and cover him over. This is that ancient tragedy....

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But Hough stood with his back to the hills and at last I looked in. the direction he indicated. "That is Mr. Pride's study. You'll be working with him there."

The study of Richard Pride. I had not noticed it at first, the gray of the stone blended so closely into the gray of the trunks and the blue-gray mist between them, even in full daylight. It was as if a flattish head thrust out from the trees; those surely were eyes, not windows, and that a broad snout, not a door. And as I stared I could discern shoulders and a ridged spine behind them partly concealed in the foliage. By no architecture but his own imagination had Richard Pride planned the thing and built it fifteen years ago. Now I understood better what it was the hills so intently regarded. This complicated the drama, this peering monster. What part did it play?

“It’s an extraordinary place, and larger than you would think. The ground drops away, you see. There are three stories in the rear. That’s what we call the stacks and there Mr. Pride keeps his records.”

“But what are the records?”

“Let’s walk on, then, the afternoon is so fine. I want to try to explain, to some extent, what Mr. Pride is doing. Then you may glance through this”—Hough tapped a thick notebook that he carried

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under his arm——“and it will explain further. Mr. Pride is very eager not to be misunderstood.”

So we crossed the clearing and dropped again into the woods, which seemed hushed and purposive and expectant now, more dusky and mysterious.

“Mr. Pride,” Hough was saying, “is a most remarkable man. You’d hardly take him to be more than fifty. I’m not yet quite forty but he is much stronger than I. His senses and all his faculties are electrically sensitive, and his vigor and endurance nothing less than marvelous. When you consider that for almost a quarter of a century now he has devoted all his energy to the experiments in which he hopes you will assist him ... the most confining and exacting work, for him at least ... his vitality is seen to be all the more astonishing. For Mr. Pride is nearly seventy years old.”

We paused to light cigarettes, and I observed that it would not argue much for Mr. Pride to point out that his hand was steadier than that of his secretary; for Hough’s was trembling badly. He jerked away from my match and puffed for a minute in silence, slicing fretfully at blown weed and drooping bough with his stick, as we continued on.

“Admirable as he is now, it’s not hard to imagine that Mr. Pride must have been something of an heroic figure in his young manhood. His family

was

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rich and socially distinguished, and he began life under the most auspicious circumstances. He was more than capable of taking advantage of them. He traveled every part of the world, visited every fine city and was entertained in many a court. He was much of an adventurer, but much too of a scholar. His explorations in Yucatan laid the foundation for many recent discoveries in the Maya history and culture, and he made important contributions to the study of Peruvian archaeology. Also ... he married late, you see, and ... well, his contacts with women during these years are to be classed rather with his adventures.

“Yes, he was Don Juan and Marco Polo made into one. Probably no man ever had such opportunities and was so equipped to enjoy them. At least I never heard of such a man, never read of one in the most extravagant romance.”

... “Yes?”

“And then one day at the very height of his enjoyment, on the eve of his most abounding happiness, something happened that brought him short with a pang. He became aware suddenly of the actual poverty of existence. It is so fugitive. Of all the fates had lavished on him there remained nothing. He possessed the moment at hand, the moment just passed, no more than these. Carelessly he had let

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his days slip from his hands and they were lost, utterly lost; beauty and triumph together, days and nights and whole seasons, gone. Do you understand?”

The pale eyes full of anxiety worried on mine and I was faintly amused, but I had no heart to mock him. The story of Richard Pride, outlined so cursorily, had impressed me. No doubt what Wilfred Hough said about him was extravagant, nevertheless he would be well worth meeting, someone to sit with and talk. “Of course I understand. Other men have come to the same realization, haven’t they? Isn’t that the motive which animated Pepys and Casanova and the countless other diarists? They try to recapture the vanishing past and keep the swift present, embrace the whole scope of a

We had circled through the woods, we faced south again now, where toward the western ridge the sun was sliding down into the somber flare

and quick nightfall of an autumn day's end. Underfoot the dried leaves crackled and the pungent odor of them was heavy beneath the branches.

"And so, Mr. Pride began a journal. More than that, he began to seek out the old years. Here; in this you'll find some of his first entries."

At last Hough gave me the volume and I glanced

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into it, finding the pages yellowed and brittle and the ink fading.

"But the experiments," I suggested. "Just in what way does this compilation of Mr. Pride's autobiography effect me? How does he expect me to help?" Then an idea occurred to me, arrested me by the weight of its own monstrousness. "You don't mean that he's filling those stacks with his memoirs? Three floors of them?" I could not help smiling.

Hough stiffened defensively. "You have no comprehension of the magnitude of Mr. Pride's project or the searching method by which he has approached it. I may add that his work has opened up new reaches of investigation which, really, I've not had time to follow. Very little of that comes before me. I advise you to look over this notebook; it will prepare you to meet Mr. Pride, and I dare say you'll find him interesting."

Once again we came out into the clearing where crouched that grotesque study of Richard Pride's, now in the thickening slate-colored evening merging more closely into the woods. I thought of the enormity of the madness which sought to fill those spacious shelves with the chronicles of dead hours, more than a man could ever read even did he choose to spend his life at it. But then I remembered

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Hough's broad summary of Richard Pride's life, the most replete of all human careers, beyond even the dreams of romance; and I reflected what brave stories must be filed away in that mysterious dom-daniel, what spectres must linger in its corridors, what pathos of beauty so desperately cherished. Silently we crossed the lawn, busy each with his meditations, And what were Hough's I cannot say; but mine, as we thrust into the woods, were weird enough. For it came upon me how like that squat place was ... there muzzle on forepaws, there the great bristling shoulders ... to the beast Tod as he lay in a doorway and stared upon us....

“If it is true that the memory of an experience, the memory picture as they say, or the neurogram, can never be effaced, but remains forever etched on the sensitive plate of the nervous tissue—somewhere, somehow —then all of my life is ready to hand, provided only that I can find the instrument with which to uncover it.”

So began the journal of Richard Pride which Hough had given me and which that night, alone in my gothic chamber, by the pale flicker of candles, I studied. In a broad free hand it was written, but

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from time to time the words crowded close, or sprawled and tripped over each other as the vehemence of the writer harried them across the page....

“If it is true, as psychologists are agreed, that the memory picture is ineradicable! For they contend, and their evidence is plentiful, that everything once seen or heard leaves its impress to endure to the very end of life. So in old age the processes of senescence, while they blunt the senses and deprive one of one’s memory of recent events, seem to release certain veils and lo, into one’s mind streams a whole flood of memories out of the far past—forgotten memories, names and faces and deeds that one has not thought about for decades. And so, in that suspension of consciousness which comes at the incidence of death, all of one’s past glows clear and fresh and living in the sick mind.

“And their experiments—the psychologists’—with subjects under hypnotism or in certain nervous states, to probe the memory are amazingly suggestive. I cannot stop thinking of that classic instance of the old woman, a peasant person quite uneducated and unfamiliar with Latin or with pharmacology, who recited while under hypnosis a long list of drugs. She had seen these on the bottles on some apothecary’s shelves, probably while waiting for a

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prescription to be filled, and probably also without being conscious of seeing them; she may have been thinking of something entirely different. But the memory picture was fashioned, and there laid away in her unconscious it endured, until a contingency suddenly revealed it.

“There is a queer enchantment in this theory. For it would seem that all our past—our joys and sorrows, our lost friends and our achieved deeds—

grow into us, become an integral part of us, are flesh and blood of us. And thus we are bone and sinew our past years. In my breast beating with my heart, living in the swing of my blood, stored away in nerve filament and fiber, are the women I have loved and the friends whose hands I have taken. In my fingers my seas and ships, in my flanks my mountain peaks, in my cranium from which I peep at this paper my moons and suns!

“I shut my eyes, I wait behind the closed lids, I rove my veins and explore my bosom. Presently the darkness thins away, the moon is high already in a night I had forgotten, little waves splash against the ancient piles of a quay; and there two vagabonds lie snoring, bundles of shadow; and there a pile of cordage and tackle drips and exudes an odor of brine and fish; and by my side is Eva ... strange mad girl, how long were her black lashes!

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Not twenty-five years ago, but now, and forever; in me, and of myself, ineradicably mine!”

Late into the morning I pored over the notebook of Richard Pride, pausing from time to time over certain entries which told, in a passionate manner that seemed singing, an extraordinary narrative. Just what tragic eventuality it was that had made Pride aware of his past the journal did not say; but I gathered that it must have been about the time of his marriage to Miriam. At first his experiments were in the nature of play. He had come to see the possibilities of memory, that was all. Casually in moments of leisure, on a train or tram, at the theater during a dull act he would solicit some vouchsafement out of his past. It was angling, it was sport to him, and he indulged in it without system or particular intent. He was alert, realizing their value, to seize and secure those occasional unexpected revelations that come with an odor or a phrase of music, a color or dream.

Odors in particular seduced him.

“I have recovered an afternoon!” he wrote triumphantly one time: “out of the shadow, a living ember out of the ash. At dinner today we were served a heavy purée of pea soup. With the first whiff of odorous steam that came to my nostrils there was conjured up a stretch of countryside and an old

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friend and a dog, one afternoon when I was a boy, in midsummer when the hay was newly mown.

“Yes, in a moment that afternoon was living again. In the hay loft of the great red barn two boys and a puppy romped, threw themselves from high rafters into the hay, tussled and hid and shouted and pranked. In the end there was no way to get down again for the puppy, but to be dropped; and so finally in desperation his master held the squirming terrier out over a pile of hay on the floor, thirty feet below, and let him fall. He struck sickeningly and lay as if paralyzed. Dizzy with terror the boys clambered down to his rescue. But it was fright and not hurt that ailed him; presently he was on his feet, and the three were off at full gallop down a long hill to the pasture lot, where a cool white brook curved into a swimming pool. How inexpressibly amiable the sun was on bare skin, coming out of the cold spring water and scampering naked about the fields!

“Yes, for a moment I live once more that afternoon, miraculous, quick and pulsing and shimmering with sun: the sweet smell of the clover drenched with sunlight in the meadows, the coolness of shade beneath the tall elms, the caress of water. Then the magic is ended, reality snaps back upon me, I am aware with a gasp of the dinner table, someone is talking to me, a servant is filling my glass. ‘Pardon

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me,’ I stammer, embarrassed; ‘I didn’t just understand what you were saying. The soviets in Canton ...?’

“But the moment was mine and I kept it; all evening by myself I lingered with it; in all its detail I have recovered it, I could write a volume about it, I know all that joy once more. I frolic with the yelping puppy, I wrestle with my companion and chase him across the fields. Tired at last with the complete aching weariness of boyhood I turn home, up a long dusty slope and around a bend where a maple tree stands, broad branches reaching clear across the road.

“All this, in a thin wisp of steam from a bowl of soup! So an odor, suggesting another odor which itself is woven into a memory picture, evokes the whole picture. The veil lifts for an instant, the dust stirs into the old shapes, there is a rift in the present and the past is seen through it, vivid in beauty. What miracle could be more marvelous than this?” ...

It was shortly after this episode that Richard Pride made a beginning of systematic investigation. For musing still on that afternoon and on others

which it recalled he took pen and paper one idle evening and blocked out a chart of the years he had lived. Forty years, season by season and month by month, he laid out. Then in a general way he wrote

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in localities, spanning the world before he caught up with his present; and incidentally as he added these he put in names that came to mind. But he brooded over the result, baffled by so many hiatuses, such vast uncertainties. This first effort to scan the whole pageant of his life made all the more clear to him how much he had lost. To seek his Christmases year after year, his very birthdays, and find the half of them missing! To think that a birthday could be forgotten!

“To think that so much as one moonlit night can ever be utterly lost! A night of love beneath the moon, a night of long ramble by brookside and hill; a night of tranquil wondering on that pale luminous circle, thin selenic Host swinging in a monstrance of darkness a profane benediction, exquisite in its starry pyx! They are the ecstasies of life, these moonlit nights; it is incredible that one should ever forget them; and one forgets them all.” ...

But reflecting further on his spent holidays, Richard Pride discovered that between locale and date, a name and a place, and with some deliberate mnemonical effort, he could retrieve them one by one. Presently excited by the treasures of remembrance his endeavor yielded he did a rather startling thing. For he procured data on the times of full moon and new moon and last quarter, year by year

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back to his infancy; records of rain and clear weather, storm and snow. With these he prepared a new chart of his life; but this new chart was not included in the journal which Hough had given me, for ... one page to a month, for more than two score years ... it ran to some five hundred pages.

It was difficult for him to get reports from many places covering such meteorological matters. Pride took time to write consular agents and business acquaintances in several remote lands for such information. In the course of the correspondence that developed, during the following year or two, he sent orders also in many cases for photographs. On occasion he would go himself to cities and lands that he had visited long before. He would hunt out old people who had been his friends, explore neighborhoods he once frequented, hunt out shops and taverns and libraries

he had known, doors he had hovered near at night, windows beneath which he had loitered. Obviously it was impossible for him in person to cover so wide a range, and soon he adopted the practice of employing from time to time capable investigators to do this research for him, to send him copious notes, transcripts from newspaper files, photographs, interviews.

One such investigation had to do with a moonlight adventure in a fastness of Abyssinia, among the

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Budas. They are a tribe of smiths and potters, dreaded by their neighbors because of their reputed power to change themselves into hyenas, working great witchcraft. And Pride—then a young man vacationing from Oxford—made one of a party of Europeans who, scoffing at a rumor of this kind, proposed to capture and expose the deception of the supposed sorcerer. Three natives who insisted they had seen the transformation were bribed, by sufficient to make them local richmen for life, to lead the party to the sorcerer's retreat. The sorcerer fled.

So night after night the chase proceeded, through wilderness creeping with furtive life. Now the guides would have turned back if the hunters had not compelled them to continue. Every day, as the pursuit led deeper into the lonely hills, the protestations of the terrified guides grew louder and more extravagant, until at last the very scoffers could not help feeling restless and apprehensive and tense with nervousness. Then finally, down a glade that swirled with moonlight, they saw their quarry dodge away, manlike but fleeing with strange agility. Now quite unnerved one of the party shouldered his rifle and shot, and there was a deathly scream on the silence. Gathering their shaken courage the hunters ran up. In the brush, mortally wounded, it was a hyena they

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found ... with gold rings such as the Budas wear in his tufted ears.

The investigator Pride was fortunate in finding to unearth the records of this eerie adventure, to talk it over with the one native guide surviving, to go himself to the very scene of the shooting, was a vagabond newspaperman. His work was most thorough, precise in its detail, reported with color and enthusiasm. So impressed was Pride that he offered the man a considerable salary to remain permanently in his employ. And thus began the organization of a staff of investigators, detectives, photographers,

moving-picture operators which multiplied in time to thirty-eight, fairly covering the world which Pride had made his past.

... "He walks behind me in my very footprints, very close, his breath on my ear: Oblivion, archrogue, thieving my hours from my hands even as I gaze upon them, dropping them silver and gold into his black pocket. But he is less than I and the bright coins are mine and he will return them. I solicit him, I flatter and cajole him, often I threaten and sometimes I lay my fingers upon his throat; and one by one he restores to me the riches he has stolen. Come: I shall follow him into the dark chamber where he dwells and ransack his piled chests and explore his

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ancient corridors and kindle a light in the blackness of the caverns of his treasure vaults! I shall recover it all, my riches; mine, my hours minted in yellow and white, the face of each of them my face in smiles or tears: my life!" ...

At the time of this entry Richard Pride was devoting many hours a day to his researches. The chart of his life, by month and moon, had developed into a vast skeleton system with more than three thousand principal categories and innumerable subdivisions, contrived so that it could be expanded without limit. But it was now merely a scheme of cataloguing. The compilation of indexed records already had begun.

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To think that one can ever forget a moonlit night....

I closed that odd journal of Richard Pride's and mused for a while, staring at my candle. I remembered an incident that gave me pause myself, one day some years ago when the shadow of oblivion leaning over me was seen for a moment with startling clarity. A friend of mine, a painter of landscapes who knew with the Chinese how much nearer infinite reality a hill could be than a face, was glancing with me through the pages of a catalogue of an art

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exhibition a decade previous. Among the illustrations of paintings hung in it we came across one that caused us both to exclaim; and then we looked

for the name of the artist who had done the lovely thing, and it was the name of my friend.

“Good God!” he ejaculated with a laugh. “I had forgotten all about it!” With an access of interest he bent over the reproduction, searching it with new understanding, and some doubt, and deep love. “It was rather good, too, wasn’t it?” he meditated. “The values are true, and the composition isn’t bad at all. Where the devil can the thing be now? Somebody bought it at that very show, and I presume by this time it’s stowed away in his attic, or burned, or sold to the junkman.” ... He could not take his eyes from the page, he pored over it quite grave and quite pathetic; and he recalled the morning he fetched his paintbox into the woods and dreamed and did the picture—cascade and willows and mouldering dam of mossy stones. How completely he had lost it all! until this coincidence spread a page before his eyes, and there was the record.

Scant comfort in an art which must destroy itself in order to endure, I thought: for the sale of a painting is too often destruction of it, so far as the painter is concerned. Poets have the better of painters, and composers likewise. Their works exist in multiple

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editions and they need never dispose of them. And the work of every artist not a commercial hack is essentially the lovingly wrought memoir of a beautiful hour. But one must be quick to seize the hour and carve it, I reflected; and it occurred to me how many of my own hours I had neglected to preserve, like Richard Pride with all of his, like my friend the painter with so many of his.... How many years I have lost!

Orion with his jewelled buckler was vaulting up out of the east, Mars bore the baleful flare of his torch down into the west, in a sky one glitter of stars when I looked out of the window. It was very late and quite cold and I found myself shivering. There was a feeling in me too that I must not think too much about such things as these; and I conned a scene of the ballet on which I was working and went to bed resolutely chanting its chorus.

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... Janet was driving to the village and invited me to go. Hough waved us farewell, and as we turned a corner in the lane we saw him still where we had left him, leaning on his stick.

“Wilfred,” said Janet, “is the reincarnation of a Salvation Army lassie. Or of a Christian martyr. Or of a lapdog. Not the kind that would jump up on

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your lap, the kind that would wait to be picked up. You would hardly believe that he was a good-looking boy when he came to Mordance Hall. But he was. I fell in love with him, of course.”

“Did any one ever fall in love with Wilfred, of course?”

“Well ... I meant rather that when he first came I fell in love, of course. One falls in love with people when they first come. Like yourself, my dear; I presume I shall be falling in love with you for a while.”

“That argues little for love.” Her boldness was palpably not just bantering. She confused and irritated me. And now without the cynical laugh I expected she replied quite seriously.

“I couldn’t argue much for love. Love is the conviction that a certain man offers, without any disagreeable personal traits, the opportunity one has been awaiting to gratify a biological craving. And if one has been waiting very long one can even overlook a few disagreeable personal traits. When Wilfred arrived I thought I saw my opportunity.” She glanced at me quizzically, to see perhaps if I was shocked. “You may be gratified to know that Wilfred did not reciprocate. He saw no opportunity at all. Really, I’m gratified myself now, although it did pique me at the time.”

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Out of the lane we wheeled into the highroad, and once on hard gravel Janet slid into a reckless speed. For some minutes I could only cling to my seat, anticipating a hurdle into the ditch; but Janet was sure of herself, drove easily and without excitement, and presently her expertness calmed me.

“How long has Wilfred been here?”

“Four years. A little more, I imagine.”

“That would make you ... sixteen?”

“You mean, when I was pursuing him. Yes, sixteen. Do you think that was rather young? It wasn’t, my dear. Girls are somewhat different nowadays from what girls used to be. Even when you were in college. Short skirts. Many of them write poetry. Why, in the name of God, should girls be cows?”

“There is no reason why they should become cows, but there is no reason either why they should become promiscuous. I’m no prude, Janet. There’s much even in downright flappers that I like; I enjoy the way they carry themselves, their frankness and vigor and self-reliance. But don’t you think some girls, too eager perhaps, fail to discriminate between the privilege of going their own way and the gesture of declaring that privilege by swerving off at a wry angle? They make a point of it, even when it outrages themselves. A generation to come their daughters

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will be even more delivered and not half so loose.”

My ardor had taken me to a point Janet might well resent as insolent in its suggestions, and I was about to stammer an apology. But she laughed derisively. “Well, now, Father Oscar! I believe your text is promiscuity. And I’ll grant you that that is something grandmothers generally abhor. Well … and how about George Sand? Didn’t she haul window-washers off their ladders when the notion struck her? On the other hand somebody once pointed out that variety is the spice of life. Let’s say zest. I don’t remember that the observation was limited in its application. Variety in food. Variety in love.”

I found nothing to answer. There was no more arguing with this malapert mood than halting the wild drive of her car.

“Variety in love,” she repeated. “How are you going to keep love without variety? How many lovers ever remain faithful? Nary a one. They experiment, or else they cease to be lovers. Fidelity for a month would bore me to death. I’d rather be chaste.”

Suddenly in she thrust the brakes and, skidding in the gravel, we brought up so abruptly that I was thrown forward against the windshield. Janet turned on me vexed and quivering.

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“Say something!” she flared. “Oscar, why do you let me do all the talking? I’m going mad. Everybody up in this bedlam place is going mad. Father is a maniac, mother’s a witch, Wilfred is turning into a snake. And you’ll go mad too before the winter’s out; but for God’s sake while you’re still sane talk to me!”

She leaned back panting at the wheel, and then presently she set her foot on the starter and we proceeded toward town, but now less headlong.

“What do you want me to talk to you about?” I said at last quietly, repressing my curiosity over this distracted outburst. “Do you care to tell me more about yourself? You ... don’t seem very happy. What is it, Janet?”

“Tell me about your work,” she insisted. “However does one ever decide to write music? Is it very hard to learn?”

“No, not hard to learn, the mere writing of music. And I always wanted to compose. But whether one has anything of importance to write, that depends on how one lives and what one thinks, and is for the future to decide. It’s quite easy to learn and very, very comforting. Do you mean it, when you ask me to teach you?”

“Yes, really, I mean it.” She smiled. “You’ll have a precocious pupil who will never get past the beginning.

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That’s the way with everything I do. Begin. Oscar, I’ve never finished anything in my life.”

“I won’t insist that you finish this. Most of us never do that. I think Brahms came nearer the end than any of the rest. But we will have many pleasant hours together.”

“And are you writing music now? What are you writing?”

So I told Janet ... while we swept on northward through the woods and the sun pontificated from his scarlet chancel ... about *Helion*. I told her how Raymond Laurier, that sensitive poet, became enamored of a girl who called herself Woe, and how he tried to inspire in her his understanding of love. Male and female is all the history of the universe, but they are one thing and the sun is its symbol. The sun is the very flame of the embrace. Gazing on the stars Raymond would wonder over so many suns, and over those cold dead stars invisible to us that go questing through the blank endlessness of ether, until star meets star and they together become one whirl of fire, one splendor of candescent mist which cooling contracts and becomes a new sun. He took the sun for his protagonist, *Helion*, and the figures of male and female for antagonists, and with them Raymond Laurier created a missal of prose poems. These—with solo parts and choir and orchestra,

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and passages of interpretative dance—I was making into a ballet-cantata.

She remained silent, absorbed in her driving for a few minutes; we were approaching town and traffic was heavier. Then Janet said, "What about the poet and his lady?"

I flushed and hesitated, mindful of Janet's cynicism and my protest. "The poet killed himself," I admitted.

"Because of the girl?"

"She ... was faithless to him."

"She was promiscuous Janet eyed me with sharp and amused insistence.

"Yes, she was promiscuous. Does that encourage you? It seems to me that the quality of love Raymond offered her was very beautiful, even if she was too coarse to appreciate it; and the ideal——"

"Don't be too harsh on the lady, Oscar. Coarse is a vindictive word. She was hardly to be scolded, she was simply prey to her instincts, she couldn't help herself. Indeed it would appear that that is the very kind of woman poets become infatuated with, to their great distraction. I'm thinking of Ernest Dowson and his barmaid. And there we are. Very little wisdom I get from you. I find myself all the madder. Here's where we get out."

In the gloom of a small Syrian restaurant, empty

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save for two white-haired old men who puffed at a gurgling huqqa and sipped corrosive coffee and played ponderously at chess, we sat together an hour and drank araq, tumblersful of that white spirit turning the water into opaline fog.

"I was born in the setting sun with Neptune afflicted in the midheaven." Janet peered at me with her black eyes, weird they could be with the erethism of the drug in them. "This year the moon and Mercury are afflicted. I'm going mad. We are all mad, Oscar. Haven't you felt it?"

"Perhaps ... something," I faltered. "Haunted might be better. What a strange old mansion Mordance Hall is!"

She continued still staring as if I had not spoken. "Every now and then there is an explosion. It might have come by now if your arrival hadn't caused some diversion. Surely you must feel it all through the place. I don't know; but the tenseness seems to increase slowly, all through a year, and then in one frantic eruption it ... bursts. The servants leave. Lord God, how I hate Mordance Hall!"

"Then why do you stay?"

“I don’t. I go away. Then I come back. There’s nowhere else to go, nothing to do. Nothing at least for me to do. Mordance Hall gave me birth, it will bury me no doubt, it compels me. There is more than

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a fascination about it, a necessity. Like life itself. What good does it do to ask a person why she stays alive?... About watching Richard go groping into his cavern, with his face so white and his lips blue. About Miriam. Saturn. Or Uranus. There’s a configuration of stars the Greeks used to believe forecast a woman’s destiny as priestess in the service of Aphrodite. Venus in the ninth house.” Janet laughed. “Mother has it.”

I met her gaze directly and was moved to see hers falter. “Janet,” I said, “I think it will do you good to learn music, to lose yourself and forget your perplexities in such a study. If you really are interested ...”

Her hand was cold wax when I put mine upon it. So we talked of music. She was quick to understand, she had of course some knowledge of the art, she could play the piano. I talked, and I believe I became eloquent with the araq in my blood, and with that lovely girl beside me ... very lovely and pitiful in her loneliness and confusion and in her eagerness. “The contour of your cheek is music, Janet. That is what melodies are: curves and contours, like the profiles of cliffs, like the veering of gulls, some of them infinitely tender, some of them majestic, some of them so pure and translucent that they wrap one in light, cool one with white light.” I held her hand.

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When we came out of the Syrian’s it was dark. We were silent in the car, going the deserted road through the woods again. Our minds were empty as the sky, filled with lithe winds and little stars. As we crossed the clearing toward Mordance Hall we saw the lanterns by the great door had been lighted. “I think,” Janet murmured, “that father has returned.”

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Richard Pride had come home, but I was not to meet him yet for another day. We dined—Mrs. Pride and Janet and I—in a mood of preoccupied taciturnity. Hough was absent, doubtless engaged with his master, although no one volunteered an explanation. Tod too was absent, and once or twice I

made some comment on the dog, or on the secretary, or guardedly on Pride's arrival. Mrs. Pride responded in evasive monosyllables. Janet was dim, in her own thoughts. And so when dinner was over and Mrs. Pride excused herself on the plea of headache, I feigned weariness likewise and took myself upstairs to my chamber, to meditate on all that had happened, complicated by Janet's frowardness and distress.

On my table lay the scored sheets where day after

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day my song was taking shape. I read back through several pages to recover peace of mind and perspective. This was my work; everything else was fortuitous, a means of securing my existence so that I could give strength and dreams to *Helion*. Here lay my purpose and nothing must come between me and the fulfillment of it. So I pondered, and with the loveliness and the purity of that vision in my mind it was easier to confront what now began to trouble me: the temptation of Janet.

Did I love her? In a way her wraw analysis of love was true. And she was flamboyantly desirable with her slim strong body, her broad supple hips, her tropic lips and midnight hair, and beneath these visible beauties the unabashed fervency of her. Surely her embrace would be no gross emprise of vulgar flesh but lyric and enchanted, self-conscious and dancing. She enjoyed Debussy, her love would be cool as clarinets and warm as oboes, peregrine like his whole-tone harmonies, palely burning. But ... Mélisande?

What of the calamity she predicted? I might ignore her lugubrious predictions as the nightmares of an adolescent girl, did everything at Mordance Hall not seem subtly to confirm them. I looked out of my window, and over to the north beneath lowering clouds wavered a fetch-candle flicker of light. There

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Pride and his familiar took counsel. What did they plot? Indeed this was an estranged and mysterious household, there well might be truth in Janet's warnings; and if the place were caught up in a whirl of madness in self-preservation I must keep free of it. I would have need of infinite precaution, and under no circumstance could I allow myself to be tangled in an intimate relationship with any of the household.

And besides I did not love Janet. Not as my lovers in *Helion* loved, with utter commingling of destiny and individuality, in defiance of the Sunderer, sworn and increasing in union until the end. I considered a little that ideal love which is *Helion*, how rarely it has ever been achieved, how poet and singer have sought it like knights the grail and all have failed. Let us be cynical when we please, there is much wisdom in doubt; but this vision of perfect union is the heart of all beauty, toward which love ceaselessly strives, and the validity of it is certified by the passionate loyalty with which men have cherished from the beginning their legend of Héloïse and Abélard, of Isolde and Tristan.

I do not love Janet, I told myself. I could enjoy her, there would be a sheaf of songs in her embrace; and were my *Helion* done, were there no portent of disaster hovering over Mordance Hall, together

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we would seize our opportunity and find beauty in it. But my work lies before me....

In the morning at breakfast Janet greeted me clear-eyed and smiling and came with me jubilantly to the piano. Mrs. Pride did not come down for breakfast.

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But in the afternoon I followed Hough through the woods, that were dripping with a chilly rain and festooned with shreds of dank mist, to talk with Richard Pride.

He sat at a large desk at one end of the long low room, which with three windows from floor to ceiling gave on the terrace sloping to the Palisades. Quite shadowy was this apartment, lighted only by the gleam from a wide fireplace behind him and the seep of dusk from the afternoon that spattered upon the panes. It was walled with bookshelves and littered in every corner, on mantel and chair and divan, with an accumulation of packages and boxes, some of which partly open disclosed the shine of brass or the soft smoulder of dyes on oriental fabrics, the bindings of books and the frames of pictures. But when Hough with his customary agitated deference had ushered me in, I had little mind for the room, being so impressed with the man.

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He arose to greet me with a certain hugeness of movement. And to be sure his shoulders were enormous, bulging behind the protruding head with its shag of gray hair. He wore a comfortable lounging suit of black velvet and white linen, low collar rolled down beneath the lean throat with its jut of cartilage. Against black coat and gray hair his face seemed preternaturally haggard. The eyes, pits under granite brows, at first seemed ... out. I do not know whether eyes impressed me most, or hands, in Richard Pride.

Ten inches long his hands appeared to be, hardly a third as broad. They had the whiteness and slenderness of a woman's hands and yet were powerful. They were cadaverous, death's-hands. And always they were moving, drifting one might say rather, so effortless and continuous their motion was, like the waving of long reeds in flowing water. Now one hovered upon the other, now mistily it floated to penrack or inkstand, now to a corner of the desk, now to ashtray or cigarette case. Like antennæ the thin hands wavered and tested and explored. In one fact they lost their last resemblance to human hands: for whither they went, whatever they touched, the eyes of Richard Pride never followed them.

On those rare occasions when Richard Pride ventured out of twilight into full day one would see that

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his eyes were green and very small. Now in this twilight they were almost indiscernible in the fathoms of the deep sockets. One would have said he had no eyes at all, that he was blind. Yet nevertheless one felt the pressure of a heavy scrutiny, as from behind a screen, when one faced him; and at the least noise or gesture the blank face slowly would swing and lunge in that direction....

From behind his desk the patriarchal bulk of Richard Pride pulled itself erect to greet me. "I am very glad to know you, Mr. Fitzalan. And I must apologize for not having been here to welcome you on your arrival. I trust that Mrs. Pride has made you comfortable and that Mr. Hough has shown you about. I am looking forward to a most enjoyable association with you, and I hope we can make you quite at home."

Hough, I perceived, had quietly withdrawn.

It was a roundabout conversation we had, that first interview. I would have liked Richard Pride very much, I did like him extremely when he talked, his monologue streaming smoothly along some subject of interest.

But when discussion lagged I would grow aware again of the restless hands and lost eyes.

He talked well and of everything, with an erudition detailed and expansive, and with a novelty of

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viewpoint which made his comments most provocative.

“It is not the origin or the evolution of the myth that engages me, but the attitude of the savage who believes it. We, for instance, look on sun and moon as physical bodies, the one affording us light and heat, the other reflecting sunlight from its chilled face and affording us poetry. How curious it would be to look on them, as did the ancient Peruvians, as our racial father and mother. Let us say, Abraham and Sarah: for sun and moon were Manco Ccapac and Mama Occllo, who sprang from the blue lake Titicaca and gave man law and government, science and art. To be sure there is splendor in the understanding of our astronomers: that incredible sphere of white heat. But it would be an intellectual adventure indeed to see the sun a celestial man. Really to believe that.... Beyond of course the involuntary animistic impulses that are in all of us.”...

Eventually we discussed his memoirs but we went little farther than I had already gone in his journal. He acknowledged a lively concern with dreams.

“The materials of dream are to be sure from the memory ... one phase or another of the memory. They are compounded in a hodge-podge manner that sometimes defies analysis. But once you have separated

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the dream into its component parts each can be traced down to its origin. One is surprised at the volume of dream-material that derives from what one might call the ancestral memory.” His white hands crawled across the table, his face leaned almost imperceptibly. “For of course one must grant that the engram, the memory picture, is ineradicable even from the ancestral memory.... I have had occasion to test that. Through generations.”

“You mean,” I asked, “that you yourself today can remember experiences your grandfather had?”

“More than that, but for present purposes that is sufficient. However I would not limit it to my grandfather. It would be difficult to say precisely how far back the ancestral memory extends. I have been troubled

frequently by the intrusion of some ancestral material into material from my own life, thus diverting my research and sometimes, especially in the beginning, leading me far astray. In order to identify such matter it was necessary for me to study quite closely my family history for many years ... many years. A dreamed landscape that had baffled me I was able at last to identify on the outskirts of a Norwegian village where one of my forbears ... I hesitate to say how long ago ... dwelt at one time. My emotional reactions to the dream in which this landscape figured were always of great terror.

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I was not surprised to discover that this ancestor in that town committed quite a shocking crime."

A beam in a corner creaked. In the dim glow from the fire I saw Richard Pride's face pivot slowly toward the sound. Thus the fire threw his profile, magnified and foreshortened, on the gray wall: the thrusting chin, precipitous brow and straight thin nose, grotesque and orgulous.

"I knew of course," I ventured, "that there was a certain tradition of experience from parent to off-spring. Much of that is active only in the subconscious, isn't it? Much of it is instinct. But I never heard of any such particularization of that traditional experience."

"No one ever has investigated it with such resources as have been available to me, or has been so scrupulous in identifying the materials in memory. That of course is the essence of the thing: identification. I have worked with the most tireless painstaking."

"But I understood from the notes Mr. Hough let me take that you were simply——"

"Recording my memoirs. To be sure. A labor of love but one that, even were it only for the narrative thus put together, might have some value to the world. Fortunate in many ways my life has been. And I am anticipating much assistance from you,

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Mr. Fitzalan. I have worked considerably with music in the past. I gave some attention to the fact that from time to time a bar of music would come into my mind and often cling most stubbornly. By analyzing back from it, identifying the music, locating it in time and space, I found that some perplexing details were cleared up. This time I propose a different method.

Instead of waiting for music to come into the stream of my consciousness, I am going to select the music and impose it on myself. I will point certain music on the darkness in front of me. It will show, I hope, where lies my path."

"And I am to play it?"

Pride nodded. "That seems preferable. There would be a serious distraction in the mere physical effort if I were myself at the piano. Be assured, I shall not need you long at a time. Doubtless we shall soon arrive at some plan of work that will satisfy us both. The music I shall give you, by the way, you will find extraordinary if you are interested in folk melodies. I have had several volumes of it transcribed, most of it from certain parts of Africa, some from regions of Asia Minor."

Outside it was fast darkening; the rain came down in earnest now, the rush of it across the roof and against the panes. Out of the caverns of his white face Pride was staring at me, and I felt it was proper

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for me to express an interest in his work and a content with my surroundings. But I sat abashed, watching the sluggish pulse of blood in his temples and the long hands moving and moving and never at rest, and wondering at the implication of something prodigious whenever he talked of his studies. I sat without a word, but the door opened behind me and Hough appeared.

"Mr. Fitzalan might like to take overnight that group of Buda tribal songs which came from Del Prado," said Pride. "And you may go back to the house with him. I shall be with you presently."

... The slow throb of his temples, like molten metal in a vat. It was the only sign of excitement, and the only suggestion of emotion, that ever came upon the chalk face of Richard Pride.

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In the fortnight after the return of Pride to Mordance Hall, while the doomed year dressed herself in October and stood for a little thoughtful in loveliness, I grew into my work and the new terms of my existence. My work with Richard Pride, and my work with Janet, and finally the exultation of long uninterrupted leisure for my work with *Helion*. The silences and the shadows, the candlelight and the

stealthy tapestries of the manor house harassed me less with spectral fancies, and Tod kept to himself and his master, paying me little attention even when I would be summoned to the study.

My work with Richard Pride. It was of course my living and means to the attainment of loftier ends, nevertheless it was itself in more than one way challenging. Whither Pride quested I could not say and he made no confidant of me. But day after day at odd hours Hough would come to call me, and going to the study with manuscripts I had had already an opportunity to con I would seat myself at the piano in the dim room, with a scant greeting to Pride, and play. The music was curious chromatic folksong that wailed or menaced, lusted or raged or grovelled in superstitious terror. And with the stark melody I could do as I pleased, improvise upon it, embellish and develop it, blotch in a bass of grunt and thump and savage cacophony or weave it through fugue or canon. Only through all these metamorphoses I must preserve the essential quality of the original song. Did I lose that my auditor would stir uneasily and ask for another piece. His quickness of response was amazing, and sometimes I was very happy working thus with him, feeling as not for years the increase of knowledge in me, learning again what could be done.

Silently he would listen. Yet much of the time when my improvisations did not disturb him I would think he was not hearing me ... hunched there over his table, his hands wandering. It seemed that this music strove like wind in fog, until through some sudden luminous rift he would be gone in swift flight, into what distant spaces I could not know. From the taut trunk and plaster brow, in spite of the surviving hands that prowled in tether, the man had departed. There was no one in the room with me. The sense of another presence was remote like the sense of fire on a hearth long cold.

At first the circumstances of my playing made me self-conscious and I am afraid that I gave but wretched collaboration in the experiments in which thus blindly I was assisting. Then I was inclined from time to time to burst into laughter at the insanity of them, an inclination one glance at my auditor was enough to quell. Finally one evening Hough took me into the stacks and thereafter I had no impulse to laugh.

... Row on row of them, in alcoves behind fire-proofed walls and steel doors. Through tier on tier, up spiral iron stairs and down long aisles to niched coign and cranny, we roamed the labyrinth. In spite of elaborate precautions against fire it was still only a candle lighted our way. I remarked upon the inconsistency.

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Hough shrugged. "He trusts me," he whispered.

We always whispered in the stacks. We fell into a stealthy manner as if somehow trespassing. We would remember Richard Pride in his study, brooding, inscrutable; and at every slightest noise we would imagine how his monolith face would swing vigilant in our direction, not as if he heard, but as if we hurt him. "He trusts me," Hough explained. "I am the only person in the world beside himself who has keys to these rooms. But I don't come in here very often. He finds out about it, it makes him nervous and he questions me."

Now I realized as I had not been able merely in reading about it the immensity of that index to his years and his seasons, week by week to his entire life, which he had described in his journal. It had expanded unbelievably since that was written. Now it followed back through generations of his ancestry, upstream with the current of blood which, mingled and yet always in the same span of channel, was eventually himself. I was appalled for there seemed to be no end to the thing, it must go back to Eden! And I made some such comment to Hough, feigning a smile, feeling cold and dismayed before this spectacle. Again Hough shrugged. "I'm sure he knows

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his own purposes. They are none of my business." ...

After that, when I sat at the piano in Richard Pride's study and played, I had no inclination to laugh. If my mind strayed from the music it would be dread I had to struggle against, a dread of Pride and of things vast and enigmatic of which he was emblem and personification. I felt there would be no air to breathe where Pride had gone; a torch would go out there as if in a measureless bowel of darkness. But what could he be looking at in that darkness?

My dread of Pride might have become an obsession had I not been otherwise so occupied and so content, had it not been for Janet. I was

finding so much in her! For even with her occasional panic of foreboding she was young and full of the zest of living, and one is haunted only by aged things. Pride seemed to be age itself, like the house and the denuded year and the lower register of the square piano where I sat with Janet.

Artist is prophet. I make no quarrel with men of god, their prophecy has no interest for me, it is concerned with states of euphoria in the end; it offers a heaven in which beyond hunger and cold one may contemplate the giver of food and fire and bask in the shine of his face. Torpid the blest will be forever,

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eternity like the first half-hour after roast pork and gravy. I am not eager for that. My prophecy is beauty and only dead gods voiceless and beyond wrath are beautiful. So ... with Janet beside me on the bench ... I let my fingers run across the keys, I touch grave dissonances and bring them into the mild repose of resolution, or leave them quivering on an abyss of silence like Baudelaire's "*pauvre amoureux des pays chimériques*." Bach I play for her, to show how high light and low, gracious cadence and stern urge of endeavor, blend and are made one: music of chiaroscuro, music in the round. Rhythms I find for her from the gentle syncopations of Schumann to the quintuple and septuple facets of Moussorgsky and Sibelius and Strauss and poor Griffes. Such are my lessons: I play and talk, trying not so much to enable her to compose music as be it, telling her of the beauty of order and direction and movement, the boundlessness of fulfillment possible only within the marble limitations of form.

Quietly she attends me. "I've never heard anyone talk so earnestly. Please go on, I'm trying to go with you, as far as I can." Or she hesitates, "Your brow seems glowing. You make me reverent. There is something that frightens me in you, monastic, quite austere and quite tender." But once she murmured, "If I should kiss you now I would be a nun." ...

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That night I could not put reality at my elbows and fill my eyes with *Helion*, for the thought of Janet and her kiss. Surely her avowal was chaste and never once since the night we drove and drank araq had she behaved toward me with any blossom suggestion. Beauty had come closer to her and she was sensitive to it, and I had assumed the impersonality of a confessor in my contacts with her, holding music between us always like the grated

window of the confessional, speaking to her through it. But now as she withdrew from me accepting my denial the thought of her assailed me.... I pressed my fingers on my temples and fastened my eyes on the scored paper, and I called Raymond Laurier to mind and his self-destruction.

Such a woman she may be, I told myself. Janet Pride: she would exalt me with love and then in a month grow tired of me. She is not capable yet of devotion, it may be she will never attain stability and purposiveness. Could I let her see *Helion*? She would laugh it to scorn, deride it as ingrowing eroticism. When the time comes when she can. read *Helion* and not sneer, then ... will I love her? If I do I may, and *Helion* will only sing the more beautifully.

So I fortified myself with much argument and held myself late at desk, stippling in the little marks

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which, as they leaped or sank along the level staves, traced the nostalgia of my spirit and the way in which Raymond Laurier's deceived had thought to attain completion. Now dread of Richard Pride and perilous lure of Janet wisped away. In *Helion* were amaranthine presences to consider. I was a sluice that quivered with the thunder of torrents, through me reverberated the gushing pæan; in my vision Helion lifted her brow from the pillow of morning, and Elas and Elamas sought refuge in her deep bosom, and the Sunderer hid his face and wept in his belly.... When I looked up, queasy and trembling with exertion, it would be well on toward daybreak. At my elbow the three slim yellow candles would have burned down to a pool and a small flutter of fire. Gradually reality came staring through the haze of entrancement, but it was long after the tapers were out and myself was in bed before the music finally ceased.

In the morning when Janet was blithe and tender and curious, very curious, I would be tempted to show her what I had done; but the noonday counselled me no, not yet, the time of her profession is far to come, she is but a novice.

Then after noon sometimes we would go walking, Janet and I, full of the sober jocundity of the autumnal sun; the abounding cordiality which is none

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the less quite serious and thoughtful as primitive instincts, the satisfactions of harvest in and gleaning done and winter soon, welled up in us. Or we would go driving along those superb granite roads that skirt the heavy-shouldered hills above the Hudson, Storm King and Bear Mountain and their brothers.

“There is the first symphony, Janet. That is music. Here it sweeps through the lower strings, the celli lift their voices in earnest proud crescendo now between the rocky shores; and a little farther down it slips into the mild violins, moving delicately and fed by woodwind rivulets and the silvery glissando of cascades, celesta waterfalls; but eventually it straightens out, it leaves off dancing and begins to march; and then you will hear the pomp of trumpets, music for warships to float upon, not to be spanned by puny trusses of steel and pylons of stone. Until at last brass and strings agree, with woodwind and rolling drums, on the majestic tonic unison which is the ocean.”

Janet smiled. “Sometimes I almost understand you. But you don’t dance to such music.”

“The mountains do, and the seasons.” ...

So at last back to Mordance Hall. But every evening when the candles were lighted, when I came down to the long table, shadow fell over me. At the head of the table, silent and aloof from us or discoursing

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often himself on matters strange and fantastic, sat Richard Pride; and by his chair now, never in the doorway, Tod. Across from me Miriam stirred the pool of lye at her heart, glancing at Pride with an expression half quizzical, half contemptuous and always peculiarly challenging, or at Hough, that husk of man in whose eyes persisted nevertheless a vindictive ember. And Janet and I would look at each other; and although we never mentioned it I felt that at such moments she would have recalled to me her prediction of catastrophe, and I would not have had the assurance to gainsay her.

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Dinner at Mordance Hall.

“Del Prado will be here next week,” says Pride on one of our expectant silences. The pulse in his straight temples boils thickly. “I am very eager to

see him, I believe he will have much of interest to report. He has been two years now in Abyssima.

“Indeed. You think highly of him, I believe. I remember him well.”  
Miriam smiles.

“He is a brilliant young man, and if not so cautious as he might be at least energetic. He gave me invaluable assistance in that matter of Lucy Martin.

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There, Mr. Fitzalan, is one of the most baffling episodes I have ever encountered. I searched through all the circumstances trying to find some explanation and ... beyond what might seem most extravagant, even macabre ... I could find none. It was the nearest I ever came to murder. I was six years old.

“Lucy Martin was the daughter of an Episcopal clergyman who reached a station of some importance in his church; he was coadjutor bishop in a middle-western diocese. There was a vein of madness in his family. One of Lucy Martin’s brothers became a drug addict and disappeared, another was a kleptomaniac and was arrested several times. Lucy Martin was the brightest and healthiest of the children. My own memory of her is that of a charming, amiable maiden lady of perhaps forty, a woman children went to at first sight.

“She attended college in the East. Home after graduation she was much courted and eventually she became engaged to a young man prominent socially and well-to-do. The match was regarded as most fortunate, the boy and girl were devoted to each other, and the wedding was announced as an event of the season. In the cathedral the service was to be performed; it was crowded with guests; Dr. Martin fretted in the sacristy in his vestments. The

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groom’s party was late. When Lucy Martin had waited twenty minutes word was brought her. The groom had shot himself.

“No one suspected that Lucy Martin could have been in any way to blame. It was agreed that the young man was worrying over some secret misdeed and dared not face confession of it or exposure. Lucy Martin collapsed. Convalescent after a month she went to Europe and spent some years in Paris, engaged in various studies. I have remarkable data concerning her activities during this period.

“Before she returned to America two episodes brought on a nervous breakdown which kept her long in a sanitarium. Not, mind you, that any hint of insanity was ever breathed against her; it was a case of psychasthenia following shock, and there was ample reason for it.

“First, a girl with whom she had been living and to whom she was extremely attached took poison one night when Lucy Martin was out, leaving no more explanation than had Lucy’s fiancé. In this case a possible motive was found in an unhappy love affair which the girl had suffered a few years previous, and from which her companionship with Lucy had been apparently her chief refuge.

“And then, Lucy herself was the victim of an attack on the street, in broad day, by a man of her

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acquaintance, a writer and antiquary with whom she had been working. They were walking together just before noon, without the least quarrel or disagreement. He drew a knife and slashed at her. She struggled away and passersby overpowered him. He was held and adjudged insane, and possibly he died long since in an asylum cell.”

The face of Richard Pride inclined slightly as he raised his cup to his lips. He had fallen into the habit of addressing himself to me at dinner; he had deferred to me in a gesture of hospitality at first, and now he directed his thought to me often by name, always by the protrusion of his chin. The beaded deep sockets would veer and confront me and I never grew used to them. It was not being stared at; yet it was being ... faced, by blind intelligence. The impression is hard to define. And now as Pride sipped I could not take my own gaze from him, but I was sensible of the usual fixations about our obsessed table, in the candlelight. Janet I knew was regarding me, and Miriam’s scrutiny was upon Hough, and the secretary panted in his confusion....

“Meanwhile Dr. Martin, scandalized by the misfortunes that afflicted his family, retired from the active ministry. Eventually Lucy Martin came to New York and being compelled now to support

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herself undertook to conduct a day and boarding school for very young children of the better class. I have mentioned the assuring manner she had with children, and she seems always to have loved them; and far in advance

of the time she organized classes in which play and instruction were skilfully combined. With her social connections and commended not only by her remarkable education but also by her acknowledged graciousness and charm, she made an effective appeal. Her school was soon filled to its capacity. I was one of the pupils.

“Now, you have probably made your own conclusions as to what led to the suicide of her fiancé and her dear friend, and the impulsive attack on her by another companion. Some sadism in her nature which tormented her victims to the point of homicidal frenzy. But what happened, one April morning perhaps three years after she opened her school, discounts such an easy explanation. Remember, she was at this time a thin, slightly graying, gentle woman of nearly two score years, quite virginal and quieting, keeping much to her own company in her leisure and apparently most interested in the half-hundred youngsters who were her charges. In turn we were devoted to her, we competed with each other in bringing her childish gifts, flowers and

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candy; we obeyed her for love and not fear, because no child was ever punished in her school. None of us was more than ten, and there were more girls than boys among us.

“That morning, Lucy Martin was giving us the usual story-talk with which our day began. It was a blithe sunny day filled with the singing of birds in Central Park beyond our windows, fragrant with young buds and sprouting leaves. I remember growing restless in my seat, inattentive to the story, fidgeting with hands and feet. A little girl across the room began to whimper; one of the teachers who was standing in the rear tried in vain to quiet her and at last led her out into the hall. My blood seemed rebellious somehow. I felt as if I had a fever, and, recalling the coming of mumps the winter previous, I felt of my cheeks. Dots swarmed in my vision. I was growing aware in the gradual uncomprehending way of childhood that something was the matter with me. The air was thick and hard to breathe, the voice of Lucy Martin lay across it like brass rods, the windows were aching blurs. Toward the front a boy stood up, his chair scraped back on the floor, I saw him making his way toward the aisle. Something beat like a vast laboring heart. Now other boys were getting to their feet, and girls too, I could

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hear them all through the room, and an impulse seized me to follow; and all I could see was Miss Martin."

Pride sighed. "What I saw, rather, was beyond description. I think no nightmare was ever quite like that. In an obscure and musty manuscript of the necromancer Borsini's, in the early twelfth century, there is a fleck of the same color. It filled me not with terror but with hatred.

"The rest of the story is, practically at least, beyond my memory. What I remember is odd enough but relevant only in the most fantastic way. What actually happened is that every child in the room, that mild peaceable morning, arose and thronged as if by signal against the platform. They were at Miss Martin before the other teachers could intervene. Men came running in from the streets and helped wrench the little beasts from her, beating and kicking them back. Miss Martin had fainted. She was seriously injured too; she had been ... bitten at the throat and on her arms and shoulders and legs as she tried to ward us from her.

"But I remember awaking again into the brightness of the April morning, much confused by the horrified running and calling and sobbing with which the school was filled, and by my own bruises and cuts and rent clothes. We were hurried home to our

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parents of course. Miss Martin was taken to hospital. The whole affair was kept out of the newspapers, but Miss Martin never attempted to reopen her school. Word came that she had gone back to Europe. My efforts to trace her there, however, were quite unsuccessful—even with so acute an investigator as Del Prado.

"And what do you make of that, Mr. Fitzalan?"

I had nothing to say and could not force a comment. But Miriam was talking in her even leashed voice, inquiring about Del Prado's arrival and the probable length of his visit. Hough's cup rattled nervously in the saucer when he put it down, and he laid his napkin on the table. Presently we arose and I went to my room and sat there alone for hours unable to rid myself of the cold diabolism of that story of Lucy Martin, trying to convince myself that it was a fiction of Richard Pride's sick fancy but too impressed by that manner of literal veracity which lent weight to whatever he said, wondering too at Pride's hint of a meaning too incredible to declare....

The house was quiet, it was nearly one o'clock. I found myself craving the companionship of sound,

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and although I felt watched I made bold at last to steal downstairs to the music-room. A few charred logs were still smouldering in the fireplace. I put a stick of maple on them and watched the new fire leap, holding my chilled fingers to it. Then I went to the piano and played, very softly and for myself alone.

I played Schumann's *Warum?*, which is the quietest and most lonely questioning ever a spirit breathed, knowing there is no answer and there never will be escape, the most nostalgic even in its bound and necessary compliance. *I know, thus it must be, and good or bad are words for which the destinies have no ears, and prayers and tears are no coin to bribe the equinoxes; but ... why?...* Then I found in my fingers the mild drifting that is so misnamed *Arabesque*, but it did not satisfy me, and presently I was playing Brahms's *Wiegenlied*, and from that it was not far to the *Berceuse* of Chopin. So I meditated what sensitive contours the minds of men assume when they address themselves to children, and how men never do outgrow themselves the mother-hunger at the knees of darkness and under the pain of impossibilities. And I remembered the song from *Hänsel und Gretel* and played it, braiding new melodies about it out of my own disappointment and sorrow. But when I had looked a little into

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the fire I touched the grave assuring affirmation of the Arietta in C, in the last Sonata of Beethoven, that declares in spite of thwarted hopes and lost endeavors the goodness and beauty of life and the triumphing soul of man. And I played it through to the end, taking comfort in being so near him whose tribulations were devastating and whose will nevertheless so resolute.

After the last echo of that music had ceased to tremble in the wires I arose and started, wearily now and not downcast, confident I would continue to the completion of many dreams, toward the door. There stood Tod.

He stood in the doorway regarding me with the small cruel eyes glinting now and then in the glow from the fire, and I stopped short with surprise.

That was unfortunate perhaps, although it is hard to believe he was affected by so small a token. When I put foot forward once more he rumbled a menacing growl and, unable to see distinctly, I imagined his tusks bare and his back bristling. As I approached the growl became a snarl that halted me at last with actual fright. Quite obviously Tod did not intend to let me pass. Apparently no less he did not intend to molest me in the music room. There in the door he waited.

I spoke to him pleasantly and ventured another

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pace. His response was another snarl and his ears lay back on his head. I tried command, ordering him away in a voice harsh as I could manage in that hushed place, and was no more successful than before. I drew up deliberating, uneasy at this queer beleaguerment. In part ashamed of my fright, in part because I desired anything rather than meet Richard Pride again before morning, I hesitated to call for aid. Shortly, I reflected, Tod will go away, he is not interested in me, something will distract his attention. If I wait here a few minutes and ignore him. So I dropped into a chair that was wholly in the shadow and prepared to wait. Tod let himself down on his belly, his muzzle on his forepaws, still alert.

Out in the great hall on which the music-room gave, itself lighted only by the fading glow from the hearth, an old clock was ticking. From here and there through all the structure a beam at intervals would creak, and once a pocket of steam in the core of a log burst with a shower of sparks. After fifteen minutes perhaps when Tod had given no further indication of menace I started toward him again. He was still wakeful and vicious. Then I armed myself with the poker from the fireplace and returned to my chair, quite dismayed now, no longer assured that he would not come in and attack me.

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It must have been an hour before, however furtively it may have been opened and softly shut, I heard the inevitable squeak of the great door on its hinges, and a moment later a voice. I sat up glad at this hope of deliverance. But at once I shrank back hoping only not to be discovered, for what I heard was not meant for me and not good to know.

“Kill him? Do you really think, Wilfred, you would have courage enough for that? You’re getting too many ideas of your own. That’s

dangerous, Wilfred."

"I didn't say kill him!" The secretary's voice was an agitated mingling of supplication and anger.

"But you meant it."

"I ... meant it. Yes, I would have courage enough, I would do it for you, Miriam."

"And I don't want it done. Why should I want him dead? And to be sure, how could we kill him, you or I? You are his, nothing but that. So am I. Stupid, stupid! Why have you never thought of killing yourself?" Miriam laughed. "Someday perhaps he will kill us.... Wilfred, you have begun telling me lies."

"Miriam!"

"You lied to me about the piano-man. Now you

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are lying to me about Del Prado. When you lie ... you lose value. You should learn your own values, Wilfred."

Through the music-room door I saw them loiter toward the stairway, Miriam on Hough's arm, both heavily cloaked. They did not perceive the shadow of Tod in the door, they could not see me; and I pressed into my chair, and Tod lay facing me ceaselessly vigilant, without turning his head once toward the belated homecomers.

"Yes, I lied to you." Hough was calm and strangely vigorous in his desperation. "Haven't you lied to me?"

"Not in the least, about the piano-man."

... And that, I mused, must be I: a rather sarcastic commentary on my artistry!...

"How do I know?" Hough blurted. "You have lied to me. But it doesn't matter, the time is past. Now I want no more lies, no more of this bickering malevolence, no more deception. I want no more of ... him. Oh, Miriam, I love you!"

"Are we back again at that? Wilfred, must I give you a memorandum in writing, or make a phonograph record of it? I don't love you, I never have and never shall."

"You are to blame!" the secretary challenged rising

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to a pinched hysterical forte. "Miriam, if you did not love me why did you  
\_\_\_\_\_,"

The slick of a whip across soft skin cut short Hough's recrimination and his pronoun ended in a cry of pain. Wretchedly I writhed in my chair and pressed my hands to my ears. Twice came the cry again and the sound of a scuffle. Then just as I sprang to my feet decided at least to prevent any killing that night and almost before my eyes, the noise ceased. Quick steps ran up the stairs. At the foot of them ... I could see now, stepping nearer the wall ... stood Hough, leaning heavily on the balustrade, his head hanging. As I watched he shook with a convulsive sigh. "Ah, Miriam, Miriam!" I heard him sob.

For quite a long while he stood there, and then he sat down on the stairs and put his head in his hands, a pathetic childlike gesture of hurt and bewilderment. At length he in turn went off upstairs. I had quite forgotten his words, feeling so deeply the pathos of him. Now that he was gone I remembered what he had said. I glanced at Tod, I told myself it was absurd to submit to captivity by this brute; my indignation mounted, given purpose and strength as more and more I realized how grave was the colloquy I had overheard. This time I

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strode directly at Tod. He lay without budging as I passed.

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The east was graying as I pulled off my clothes.

Now what should I do, I wondered. Should I tell Richard Pride what I had overheard? It might be unnecessary to warn him; I could not imagine Hough ever whetting his purpose to the point actually of murder, not at least without Miriam's connivance and this she had refused him in terms too acerb to be doubted. It might cause more trouble than not to tell, I pondered. And then the idea of taking such news to Pride filled me with dismay. I had never seen him angry, and rage in that enormous body, behind the lemur face, in the crawling hands, would be terrible to see. On the other hand I could not stay at Mordance Hall without revealing what I knew of Hough's tendencies. There seemed but one recourse for me, to quit the place. Would that mean quit Janet? It need not, and yet it might....

Exhausted I fell into a heavy sleep. When I awoke at noon it was with my resolution taken, so that I put a few manuscripts into my bag before I went downstairs to a late breakfast.

Janet was at the table. How white were her cheeks and gray her eyes, how worn with anxiety

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she seemed! She was the image of suffering, and I put aside my own forebodings and inquired about herself.

“Good morning.” She gazed at me earnestly with the singular sweetness of expression that now and then came near shining on her face. “Last night I dreamed Beethoven. I dreamed I heard Beethoven himself playing, and even when I woke it seemed I could hear him. That’s better than nightmares.... I’m glad you came here, Oscar Fitzalan.”

I busied myself with coffee and toast and sought for words to tell her how soon I hoped to leave; and I believe that guiltily I muttered something about music and beauty and being glad myself to have come to know her.

“But before the Beethoven,” she continued, “I had a nightmare. It was very hideous. And the stars are ominous this winter. Mars is in Aries like a bloody sword, he threatens my Moon.” She rested her chin on her interlaced fingers, infinitely tired. “Oh, I wish, Oscar, that I knew you were going to stay with us all winter long! I feel safer, knowing that you are here.” ...

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So I remained at Mordance Hall, and I said nothing, not even to Janet, of what had passed that

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night between Miriam and Hough. As for Hough, when I encountered him next day at the study he was nervously voluble with explanations for a red sliced cut that ran from temple to chin: a thorned branch had lashed back at him as he came through the woods, he declared. Miriam was amused behind her pretense of sympathy. Incredibly their walks and companionings went on as if nothing had happened. They hung over the chess board, or Hough would read to her ... poems of T. S. Eliot, *Don Juan* over and over

again, *The City of Dreadful Night*, the scabrous fantasies of a narcotized Norwegian of. whom I had never heard ... while she stared at him.

Del Prado came one afternoon as I had come, and we met him at dinner.

He was what might commonly be called an ingratiating personality, meaning by that of course shallow, one reliably not to distress you with original ideas or attitudes. Spanish-American by birth he had been long in the United States and spoke an easy vernacular English with only enough accent, and that carefully cultivated, to match his moustache. He was adventurer and rover and shrewd opportunist and it was evident from the first that we would not agree.

Miriam knew him from a previous sojourn at

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Mordance Hall. Remembering Hough's insinuations I watched her curiously when she greeted him, but there was nothing to betray any communion between them. Hough was surly and I, understanding more fully now, could see he was jealous. But then apparently Hough had been jealous of me—the “piano-man”—and surely Miriam and I never had more than three words alone together. Janet was excited over the new arrival. She dressed for the occasion and was radiant, in a buoyant mood, responding to the Spaniard with a sophisticated flippancy.

Our dinner table for once became almost gay as Del Prado redoubled his compliments to the women, catching kisses at his pursed lips and tossing them ravished into the air. He was overflowing with anecdotes of travel and foreign places, such as Pride, I felt, would have given little heed: the eccentricities and oddities which seem ludicrous to a man who thinks everything alien is, simply by reason of its difference. Pride listened. Perhaps he was amused, not at the anecdotes but at the man. One could never say.

We clashed, Del Prado and I, soon enough over jazz.

“If you'd play something light we might dance,” he proposed. “You'd never believe how hungry I got, among those niggers, for some good snappy jazz.

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There was a jazz band on the boat and I couldn't tear myself away from it. Válgame Dios! I danced from Cherbourg clear into the customs house at Pier Forty-Nine.” He glanced at Janet with an invitational smile.

“Oscar . . .” she began; but then she hesitated, “I don’t suppose you know any jazz.”

They vexed me, both of them, but I tried not to be rude. “Unfortunately I don’t. Perhaps I’m rather pedantic but I don’t like jazz.” A phrase of a black-bottom melody that I could have played blindfold came through my head, from the reeking years of my drudgery in a café orchestra; I could almost smell the food, nauseous and steaming. I thumbed the melody on the piano, drew my fingers down the keys in a shrill glissando, slammed shut the keyboard and swung around. “Really, you must excuse me.”

Del Prado laughed, his good spirits tinged with sarcasm. “There is art, we must apologize.” He laid his finger mockingly along his nose. “Pardon me, I didn’t mean to offend you, Fitzalan. But abroad you know they consider jazz the great achievement of American music. It makes me laugh sometimes to see our highbrows sneer at it, and the French, who possibly know a little more than we, admire it.”

“Of course, not all Americans do sneer at it.”

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Janet looked at me sharply, annoyed it would seem at my refusal to play. “There is Gershwin; I believe, Oscar, that he’s considered an excellent musician? Why, jazz is even getting into opera.”

“I don’t think American music will reach great altitudes by way of jazz.” I spoke quite indifferently although Janet’s championing of Del Prado surprised me. “In the first place, jazz is not a particular kind of music. You get jazz when you play any score with saxophones, muted brass and a banjo or two. Jazz is simply a burlesque manner of playing. And the music jazz orchestras select will usually be found beneath contempt.”

“Well, I wouldn’t mind having some of Irving Berlin’s money,” Del Prado observed. “I’d just as soon be beneath some people’s contempt. I don’t think the American public believes him very contemptible.

I addressed myself to Janet, rather. “Yes, perhaps you’re right. But all you prove is the superficiality of the American public, not the nobility of Irving Berlin’s music. I’ll grant that jazz is the most original contribution we have made in music. Likewise the comic strip is our contribution to art, and the leg-show our contribution to drama. These are hardly things to boast of.”

“There’s fun in them. Why, for heaven’s sake,

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object to fun? Why is it so sinful to laugh?" Del Prado, more and more hilarious as I grew serious, sinned at my expense. "You artists are puritans of the rank kind, you'd like æsthetic witch-burnings and inquisition, you never laugh."

"On the contrary," I snapped, "the best of art is capable of laughter. Doubtless not the maudlin bellyLaughs of a Harlem black-and-tan cabaret, no smutty guffaws in it; but a laughter no less blithe. There's humor in *Tyl Eulenspiegel* and in *L'Apprenti Sorcier* and in Ravel's *Ma Mère l'Oie*."

Then as Del Prado smiled and winked I lost myself and was off in a torrent. There is no reverence in jazz; one never feels any compulsion to leave off chatter, to refrain from a cough, when jazz is being played. It is so much a commercial product that it impresses one no more than the presence of a new flivver or a carton of highly advertised soap. It is to Strauss and Sibelius and Brahms as the comic strip to Goya or Daumier. But when one listens to Strauss or looks at a drawing of Daumier's one is quieted and exalted. To be sure one may smile or even laugh, but it is a different and a chastened laugh. In any artistic effort that is earnestly conceived and skilfully wrought there is reverence. But in American music——

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"Jazz, Father Fitzalan," Del Prado interrupted with a clowning sign of the cross, "is how you feel after confession. It's like a cocktail and Sunday dinner after mass and a sermon. And people are rather tired of sermons. People like to shake a leg now and then. More tinkle and less blah. The only sacred relics left are bottles. God give us a laugh!"

He too addressed Janet and she was pleased to smile at him.

Like a lonely crow I hung that evening on the edge of my chair, my nerves frayed with vexation and embarrassment and doubt, longing to be away and yet hesitating to brave all glances should I leave too soon, trying not to watch the gay reciprocation of Del Prado and Janet, aware that spitefully she was ignoring me, and yet unable to keep my eyes from her. But at last when Richard Pride made his excuses I took my departure under cover of his. Half-way upstairs I heard a burst of merriment from the music-room, and I knew it was a quip of the Spaniard's about my earnestness they laughed at; and I had a wild impulse to return, to be rude and insolent and provoke Del Prado into a quarrel, and then get satisfaction with my fists.

But I went to my room and closed the door and threw myself into the chair at my table.

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... Reverence in art, and reverence too no less in love.

It is not possible to argue against the cynic. There is nothing in the world more devastating and unanswerable than a sneer. It provokes one into the assertion of creeds and then one is undone, for creeds are founded on aspirations and ideals and can be sustained only by faith. The interlocutor smiling urges questions of ultimate material gain which have nothing to do with creeds, and one is more and more embarrassed, having no refuge but iteration of the same *I believe* until the dispute becomes a mockery. But when the cynic has left and the lamp is extinguished peace abides with the true believer, knowing that in spite of all material wisdom and pragmatic reason he is right. He knows by God he is right. Has the cynic in his triumph any such content as this?

To dismiss from my mind Del Prado and recover my calm after the fury into which his gibes had stung me was not difficult. But it was not possible to dismiss Janet....

No, she would not be capable of reverence; and I wondered for a time whether any woman is. In my own life there have been several women, from time

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to time, and two or three of them have aroused in me the feeling of reverence; but it has not endured, the woman has gone her way ... one smiling, another treasonable ... and I have been once more alone. In Raymond Laurier's life there were many women, and in the end but one. Woe, who had inspired him to his vision of *Helion*.

I mused on my last meeting with her. From one trivial romance to another she had gone, while he adored her. She would return a draggled used blasphemous thing. There would be ugly scenes, and they culminated when she left him finally. For two months the two were apart, she in one musty orgy, he besotted in liquor but dreaming only of her. Then she returned ... on his promise to permit her her lecherous divagations, in

consideration of the beauty she gave him in spite of them. That was suicide. In a shoddy Hell's Kitchen lodging house Raymond Laurier took a room, spent an evening with his few poor affairs, and shot himself. And Woe I found, three years after that, in a Harlem joint. She had grown fat and sweaty and reeked of cheap perfumes. She guffawed. "When I get twenty pounds heavier I'm going to Brazil, where they like them juicy." And she had a box crammed carelessly with Raymond Laurier's unpublished manuscripts, among them *Helion*. She was drunk when she gave the

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*Helion* to me. Otherwise she might have had no compunction about parting with it, but she would have demanded money to buy more gin....

No, women are not so frequently capable of constant love as are men. Indeed the feminine character is quite incapable of constancy; for is it not true that in those rare instances in which they have loved more devotedly than men they have been more virile in temperament, with the qualities of purpose and concentration which are essentially masculine? So I reflected: it is woman's part to give, and she is tempted to give again and again, valuing her treasure by the number of men who seek it; while it is man's part to receive and he values the gift by its exclusiveness. Thus it comes to pass that a great artist could say, *The great man is the lonely man*.

The great man is the lonely man. Nevertheless, the greatness of Raymond Laurier was in the fervency of his desire for a companion to end his loneliness....

My pen sputtered idly across a stave. On the letters of a name ... playing at that silly game of musical solitaire ... I made a melody in C-sharp minor. Up it lifted fond and caressing, questioningly it hesitated for a long beat, then with new faith it leaped exultantly once more to a minor cadence no longer dubious or sad but white and shining and

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thrice tender. So very lovely I found it that it drew me out of my lucubrations and I began to sing with it, letting it fall instead of fly, modulating with it through a prism of glittering Debussy harmonies, coloring it red with the brass and blue with strings and yellow with oboe and viola. It could be morning star or Hesper, it could be the thrusting of young plumules of corn in the dun fields of early June, it could be the rustle of June-grass dying in October, brown along the sere meadows. Yet

quickened, springing in triplets, it could be so madly blithe and eager!—the moment when one draws breath for the pæan.

A melody ... ten notes on a name ... Janet Pride.

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... I saw night come that stricken afternoon, autumn's end with the earth at last sleeping and the trees shrunk and puckered and stiff with cold. Night with a turban of vengeful black knotted across her brow, Night with her slow hangman's stride, began not long after noon to lift out of the north, and what was in her eyes I could only imagine for I could not see them: the head thrust forward and the face averted, and the shoulders below. But the hills heard her steps and turned to watch.

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Snow was in the air, the smell and apprehension of it, damp and cold. All afternoon I fretted uneasily in my room unable to rest or work, or think of anything but Janet. Astoundingly Hough sought me out and stood shilly-shally at my door, for what purpose heaven knows for I turned him irritably away. Miriam kept to her room ... devising what magic for what sinister end? I had spoken to her once at luncheon, to ask where Janet might be. She told me that with Del Prado Janet had gone for a drive.

When it should have been sunset the first flakes of snow came quivering down and ere the light was entirely veiled the ground was covered, the trees were creaking in the growing wind. At my window I sat and watched, without a light. I had no appetite for dinner and ignored the summons of the deep-throated gong the little negress struck, that seemed to creep through the dark corridors of Mordance Hall like an old granny peering and rapping at doors and plucking at one's sleeve. The wind was howling now ... thus the night breathed ... and the white snow piled up on the sill against the pane.

When it was ten o'clock I arose and drew on coat and galoshes and went downstairs. I met nobody. I met only the night that burst sprawling into the hall when I opened the door, blinding me with sting and

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snow, whipping away my breath, slicking the sharp flakes down my collar to my very chest, with a deafening bellow. But I leaned my head into the

blast and slammed the door behind me and was alone with it, and caring not at all whither I went I struggled across the lawn.

Knee-high sometimes the drifts were. My trousers were wet and my feet soon numb with cold. I opened my mouth and let the snow melt on my tongue, tasting queerly of frozen bark, pungent chill that dissolved almost without moisture. On the boughs of trees strained taut the night fiddled with a giant bow; and I thought of Berlioz, would-be giant, with his dream of a colossal orchestra, strings by the hundred and brass by the score, a battery of pianos and a whole forest of wood-winds. Here was an orchestra with basses lofty as oaks and valleys for trumpets that roared with the breath of a blizzard!

Through wood and valley I stumbled on, my head into the gale, my cheeks stiff and dripping, my hands and feet quite insensible. And I thought of Beethoven storming across the hills in his tempests, chanting his symphonies with the rain in his hair. What symphony would he be chanting tonight here at Mordance Hall? The limbs of the elms and hickories flailed and tortured above me, the spruces groaned and bent, the snow swept almost level across

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bare places and whirled up into my face in whistling clouds and heaped in sinuous drifts across my path: up reeled white ghosts out of the snow, leaping and writhing and pointing and falling at last, strewn into the engulfing white, spread into nothing.

I crossed a bald knoll with granite lip that I recognized, half a mile from Mordance Hall at least. Into a dozen stone walls hidden by the snow I blundered, marking the acres. Then I groped out of the woods into a clearing and in a diffused essential luminousness that fell with each flake I saw Richard Pride and his dog Tod.

They stood not witting my approach and I stopped too with surprise. The very night in its delirium seemed to draw back from them aghast, the gale hushed and the snow fell away on each side. And yet it was nothing horrible in the mere gesture they were doing. They fronted each other. I could not see Pride's face, his back toward me; but he was slightly crouching, arms extended and hands reaching, the fingers spread and crooked, head deep between his shoulders, jutting forward. I could see the face of Tod, crouching himself. His lips were back over blazing fangs, his yellow eyes were mad. Thus they stood in an attitude fierce enough but not

precisely horrible. But from the terror of Tod who saw what I could not see, from the terror of the

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very blizzard that likewise saw, I felt a nameless horror such as I never felt before.

Then Pride relaxed, pulled himself up and I thought must have smiled; and at that minute the beast too relaxed, crumpled quivering as if he had fallen; and a surge of snow blotted them out together. The wind snatched up an avalanche of snow and flung it between me and these two. I held to a tree and bent my head, gasping for breath. When I looked again Richard Pride and the dog were gone; and when I went to the spot where they had stood their tracks were buried beneath a drift.

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Perhaps a mile against the blizzard from Mordance Hall I had come. I went back circling filled with dread three times as far before I emerged into the lane from the highroad and turned up it toward the house.

Through the deep snow I plunged and I heard no more any music in the blizzard. My ears were shut, my eyes were open but they saw nothing but Richard Pride. Down slopes I went toppling and through woods groping, indifferent where my feet would fall, wondering over this privacy of night and gale on which I had blundered. These two, inseparable and

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ostensibly so affectionate, Richard Pride and his dog! Could it be some game between them? Impossible. Then what could it be?

Richard Pride. It occurred to me that I had *never* seen his face. Surely whenever he looked at me his brow was rigid, his mouth immobile, his countenance a perfect mask, a screen, a blankness without even eyes to betray the processes of emotion within. I had never seen life on that plaster death's-face. Indeed therefore I had never seen Richard Pride. Never a man; merely the outline and chiaroscuro of something which should have been man but was not. So I mused, shuddering.

But Tod had seen his face, he had seen Richard Pride, and the sight had been what? ... I remembered my eerie fancy of that far September night

when I lay down to sleep, my first night in Mordance Hall, and I gritted my teeth and clenched my fists to put the dream out of mind.

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## PART II: MIIRIAM

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99-100 Blank Pages

## MIRIAM

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... Now Helion leaned her arm on the couch of the morning and lifted her gold brow from the pillow of blue and smiled; and Helion said:

I am fulfilled which am that Elas which is the eye and the hand and that Elamas which is the ear and the mouth and vision is upon me. For I see the worlds that are of myself caught up in the hair of the winds, and the empurpled waters that are of myself coiling upon the yellow shores of the lands, and the green lands that are of myself cradling the waters. The winds that are my breath I hear, how they envelop the lands and the waters in my breath, and the men that are of myself lift their eyes to the white winds; and tree and flower and beast and bird how they inhale my breath and give it forth in song and color. Themselves myself, myself all things and purposes, and I within their spirit and I without their comfort and delight: exuberance and lustihood, the flame of the flame, the mingling from everlasting to everlasting.

But out of the heart of Helion murmured the

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voice of Elas which is seeing and touching, and Elas wondered and said, I have regarded the turning worlds and tossed them in my hands aside not understanding. How can it be that now I understand?

And out of the heart of Helion murmured the voice of Elamas which is hearing and saying, and Elamas said, I have listened to sough of wind and wash of water and I have scorned them doubting but they were perjured, not understanding. How can it be that now I understand?

Then Helion gathered into her glowing bosom the mists and the stars and into her bosom of flame the noons and the nights and into her hands the years and the seasons and fashioned them into the face which is her face; and Helion looked down from the couch of the morning and smiled, and Helion said:

The eye saw falsehood, the mouth uttered only mirage, the hand that could not see groped in vanity and the ear that could not sing shrank from the song. But in the mingling which is forever they are resolved which were

Elas and Elamas: water in water and fire in fire, dark with darkness and light with lighttide, assumed and absorbed utterly, mingled beyond the wrath of the Sunderer. Into the body of Elamas the body of Elas, and the body of Elas given into the body of Elamas, and these twain are no longer in loneliness. But I remain which am

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that mingling, the flame of the flame, forever burning until I be consumed and the foot of the Slaker tread my ashes and his foot stamp out the embers of my eternity.

Therefore the eye in my brow sees truth in scarlet and blue and gold which none can see save me, and the tongue in my mouth tells beauty made song which none save me can sing.

Behold, I am Helion....

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Letting myself in late from a pastel night ... the chalk snow and the lead sky and the wry sienna of stricken trees, without the faintest star's point of life ... I saw her go along the balcony, white negligée held close around her throat. She carried a thin flickering taper that threw gigantic shadows of balustrade and post, jerking in ponderous counter-march across the tiled pavement of the hall. Her feet hid in a haze of silks made no sound, and in a minute she was gone and the hall was dark; and my heart had quite ceased beating for she had entered my room.

How many days since I was alone with her or found opportunity for more than casual formalities of speech! She no longer even mentioned our music.

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She played and strolled and chatted now with the Spaniard; and when on an urgent summons he went grumbling off to the study of Richard Pride she fled me obviously, withdrew to her room or to some hiding place where, my sick imagination mocked me, she made a tryst with Del Prado. All this time I had sought her. With desire perhaps, I do not know, over and over again f would change the manner of words with which I planned to greet her. Perhaps desire; but now tonight the moon was in my veins.

I pressed back against the door until the bolt caught, and the snap pricked and focalized my thought, and fairly running I hurried across the hall and up the stairs. Very quietly I opened my door and stepped into my room. Janet was sitting at my desk.

Janet was sitting at my desk with the candle still in her hand but her eyes on my manuscript where it lay spread. She did not look up at my entrance, she did not hear me come in, and I waited abashed by her loveliness: the black hair billowing over her shoulders from the marble shore of her brow, eddying around her full throat, the delicate swelling of her breasts and the curve of her slim leg into rounded knee, all draped and adorned and not in the least concealed by the silk of her nightgown. Presently she turned the page and I knew she had come to the end of that passage; it was clear in my mind as on

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the paper. It would have told her what was in my mind to say, and I felt all of me pleading toward her; and it was the earnestness of my gaze that aroused her at length.

She glanced around swiftly, startled, and drew the careless folds of her gown more closely about her, and made as if to rise.

“Janet!” I walked over to the table and moved a chair up so that sitting there I could study her eyes. “How beautiful you are! I’ve been seeking you so long to tell you that, and here at last you are, and you are beautiful. It was good of you to come.”

She appeared to be collecting herself like a sleep-walker jogged awake. “The coincidence was ... fortunate, you might better say. My dear Oscar, I can’t recognize any active goodness that prompted me to slip in here. I wanted to for my own selfish reasons. You for your own selfish reasons wanted me to come. Therefore, I am good.”

“That may be one way of putting it,” I agreed slowly, taken aback and yet so enchanted by her venusty, intimate and appetent. “But I think you are good. I’ve seen you with music and watched it cling about you. Beauty abhors ugliness and it loves you. Melodies hover in your hair like sunlight, lie across your bosom like flowers.”

Her fingers fretted on the table. “What a queer

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man you are!” She nodded toward my manuscript with a twitch of I know not what malice on her mouth. “Like your friend there. Was I wrong to read his stuff? I presume to the popping end he protested that his lady was good. She must have been. Good to make love to.” Janet smiled. “Yet I dare say it makes fine music.”

“It was a dream. But if a man can dwell with such a dream, I imagine the little duration of it is enough more than to compensate for the disillusion. Don’t you understand——”

“Oscar, I must tell you——”

“—that it’s joy enough to live for a year under the very wings of an ideal! Better than live three score, a bleak bald grubbing incredulous life! Beneath your glib cynicism and your show of sophistication you know that. All men know it, and if they don’t admit it they admit at least their own frustration.”

“Oscar——”

But I flung on without giving her leave, putting my hand on hers and seizing her attention with my gaze. “Do you remember our driving, that first time, to town? You disconcerted me, Janet, with your candor and impetuosity. I was too dull and heavy to fly with you. But I loved you then and I have loved you more and more every day since ...

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while we were at the piano, while we were exploring the hills and the cliffs. I would tell myself that I could not love anyone. I was afraid, you see, to yield myself to such joy, lest it interrupt my work, scatter my strength. That was the artist in me reacting; for the artist thinks always first of his work, and of other people, lovers and friends, only when they become so much to him that his work can’t continue without them.”

I lifted her hand, cool but unresisting, to my lips and leaned toward her. “And you have become so much to me that my work can’t continue without you, Janet. You are a melody, you stand in the midst of my weaving melodies, they are the curve of your body and the profile of your spirit, they are scarves that droop from your shoulders and girdles that bind your waist and the snood for your hair. I have written you into my music, Janet, beloved. Helion is you. Believe me: your name spells it, I have found the song in your name and put it down, and horn and clarinet and violin and trumpet will tell your name, only that. Let me show you!”

She stiffened as I bent over her. “Oscar, sit down, please! You annoy me tonight. Really I must warn you that when I broke in here I had no expectation of seeing you and no desire to see you. I like to pry. I happened to be passing your door and the impulse

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seized me, knowing you were away, to see what was behind it.”

Her hardness crushed out my burning, there was such deliberation and intention in her manner. “Janet, you’ve always acted on impulse. Sneer at yourself if you please, but grant me that this impulse may have been a generous and a cordial one. And that we can make it good!”

She shook her head manifestly getting better control of herself now. “Unfortunately it was not generous or in any way cordial.”

“It was coincidence. But let’s understand that not the coincidence itself but the uses to which we put it may make the whole episode lyric. I love you!”

“We’ve arrived, it would appear, at a fairly true *Thaïs* and *Athanaël* dénouement.” She laughed. “O *Athanaël*! I can’t say you have made a nun of me, but you did succeed in making me respect the monk in you. Now the monk grovels and is no longer worthy of respect.... Please don’t touch me! Please!”

Dismayed I fell back from her, but I was quite desperate. She looked once more at my manuscript and let her fingers draw across the smooth paper, with a gesture that impressed me as not merely contemptuous. Her negligée she brought once more close about her throat, with a frown, puzzling; and finally

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she took her candle and stood up. Now she met my gaze evenly and her eyes were not unkindly.

“Oscar,” she said, “I must not keep you any longer. I didn’t intend to come here, I was going elsewhere, and I must hurry.”

... “But once you said you would be terrified to have me go, and I stayed. Do you remember, Janet? You dreamed of Beethoven playing, and you half woke and thought still you could hear him. I never told you. I was planning to leave that morning.”

For a minute obviously she did not recall the incident. Then her eyes widened. “No! You don’t mean that! I ... Oscar, I’m sorry!”

“And now it is quite true that if you go at once I shall be desolate. I don’t ask you to stay long or suffer anything—only a few minutes, only until I’m convinced you really are going, for I can’t believe it now, so readily. Wait five minutes! By the clock, Janet; just five minutes! I won’t even talk to you, but just look at you; talk to myself, and look at you!”

She almost yielded then but she had fastened her heart against me. “You make me hurt you. Why can’t you see! I was going tonight ... to Ramón. No doubt he’s still waiting and I mustn’t try his patience too far.”

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As she passed me I think I put my hands out toward her but my fingers were flaccid as she brushed by them. Not a word could I find for my hurt or her harshness; and in silence and without the briefest glance over her shoulder she stepped out of my room into the hall and pulled the heavy door noiselessly shut behind her.

Alone I remained, in darkness now for I had not lighted another candle, eternally and in my breast the shamed and jealous blood ran all one scream. But I would break in on that cruel tryst and stamp the sallow face of Del Prado into the stone of his hearth, kill him in my hands! I went reeling through the darkness of my room filled with the frenzy of my purpose.

I hurled through the darkness, tripping over a chair and picking myself up with an oath. My hands found the doorknob. To the right lay the Spaniard’s chamber. The corridor was a pocket of night into which I plunged. But a presentiment halted me and I wheeled abruptly. That way lay Janet’s room ... and beyond the balcony, far down the hall, I saw her a pale figure of moonlight in the streaming drapes, the candle in her hand fluttering and nearly extinguished in her haste, hurrying, gliding swiftly over the thick carpet....

When she had vanished behind her door I turned

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wearily toward my own and fell across my bed and lay an hour between weeping and song.

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December invested us, by north and west winds that harried us with snow and pelted us with hail. Or all day long it would rain, and then with

night mists would surround us eddying with phantasmal shapes and mournful with the dank unceasing drip of water; and in the morning Mordance Hall would be a hill of ice that flashed in a cold sun. Manic was the year's end and an addled tale of days she counted off with her slow fingers. And we of that lurking household went spellbound about our business, with little more than comments on the change of weather and the earliness of winter, with much puzzling and introspection nevertheless, and with the foreboding of catastrophe heavy upon us.

Like the gradual metamorphosis of organic structure there had come about imperceptibly a new alignment of forces at Mordance Hall, to what causes I could not imagine, and it left me the more bewildered and suspicious. Janet I seldom saw. Del Prado would pass me with a curt nod, but more than once I observed him companioning with Hough, whose behavior now was quite distracted, his tension

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venting itself in nervous shrill laughter. Del Prado was much with Pride, so that I myself would go two or three days at a time without being summoned to the study; and yet I became convinced that a keen antipathy was developing between them. I could discern it in Del Prado's almost undissembled sharpness when we were together rather than in any betraying expression on the asbestos-white visage of Pride. Then I would recall Hough's plotting and I would be tempted anew to tell Richard Pride about it, forewarn him against his secretary. But that would so involve us all; and indeed at bottom I had no great fear of either Hough or the Spaniard. Finally I saw in Miriam's new attitude reassurance that Hough's conspiring would come to nothing, for her friendliness toward him ostensibly was over. And quite inexplicably Miriam now became my companion.

“Why don't you ever play for me, Oscar?” she said one evening. “I won't ask you to play jazz.” ...

Three of us had sat down for dinner, and Janet had tossed away before coffee was served. Now I was so surprised at Miriam's condescension that I flushed and could only stammer some trite phrase of eagerness to be of service.

“Of course it's my fault; I'm a very unpleasant

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person and I don't think always to let people know how much I ... appreciate them." She smiled, with that warm and persuasive gentleness which informs the smile of a cordial woman and which I had never seen in Miriam's. "I have appreciated you very much indeed, I've enjoyed your playing so much, you have such a great love and veneration for music. Not at all like the virtuoso."

"But virtuosi are bored. And when they appear in recital it's themselves they are thinking of, not the music. I'm not a virtuoso and I don't play well, but——"

"You play beautifully," Miriam interrupted. "Mr. Pride admires you too, very much; he is quite fond of you. He was a very sensitive musician himself at one time."

"Indeed! I remember he mentioned playing, once or twice. Isn't it a pity to let it out of one's fingers!"

"That, I presume, depends on what one turns to in place of it. Mr. Pride is contented in his researches."

We took our coffee into the music room and Miriam dismissed the little black maid Sally. I watched her closely now; and I found myself doubting what had always seemed so plausible previously when I thought about it, the justice of poor tattered Hough's recriminations; I doubted even that I had

ever heard the slick of this woman's whip across Hough's face, or seen the scar it cut. She could be very ingratiating, she was so at least tonight.

"I'm glad Mr. Pride likes me. The opportunity I have here to go ahead with my own work is miraculous, of course, and the little work I do for Mr. Pride is interesting. But I rather wish Tod were more friendly."

"Tod's a strange animal. You've seen, him with me? You'd hardly believe that he was my dog in the beginning. But he was; he was sent to me from Munich by a friend of mine, when he was only a puppy."

"He worships Mr. Pride, doesn't he?" Narrowly I studied Miriam, thinking of that night in the blizzard, wondering if she too had witnessed any such scene.

But not a shadow crossed Miriam's face. "Do you think so?" She pondered. "Of course he does. It's difficult for me to acknowledge; I'm a creature of jealousy. So does this house worship Mr. Pride, so do these

hills. They were all mine once, too. Mr. Pride is a most assuming personality. In no disparaging sense, please understand."

... Ah, I reflected; so there is the tragedy! The stronger individual is absorbing the weaker and the process irks!... "Shouldn't we say rather that

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they are all yours together? I would think that quite a desirable relationship between two people who are in love. Husband and wife."

"No; they are just his. But it saves me from boredom. It's a continual challenge to me to contrive something that is mine alone. It amuses me to see how quickly things become Mr. Pride's. My friends, my pets, my books. Even my habits. He takes them and scrutinizes them and fits them away in his stacks. I daresay I've done him a great service, collecting people and things." She laughed, she feigned to banter, but it seemed to me that she spoke with a repression that convicted her.

I laughed too. "Haven't you ever succeeded

"One day I may show you. But tonight ... won't you play?"

So I played, but my mind was not on the music and it must have been a lackadaisical performance. My fingers tapped automatically, my mind contemplated Miriam; and I was thinking: Poor silly menaced spirit! Like so many others in this world you have not the strength for independence, only covetousness for it. You lift your thumb and think it a spire, you cut your toga to fit your shadow and your feet stumble on it; you can't understand that if you were strong enough for independence you would have no shadow at all, you would be all

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light!... Only when I was alone in my room that night I could not help but apprehend that I was wrong about Miriam, that I had not seen clearly through her gesture of amicality to the real purpose directing it. And after that curious I responded readily to her proffer of friendship and we were much together.

As for Richard Pride, what Miriam had said about his liking me I found amply confirmed in his own demeanor. More than once he seemed veering toward a more intimate discussion of the extraordinary experiments on which he was engaged. His plans obviously were gaining momentum and aim. There was an atmosphere of preparation, of leave-taking and the arrangement of affairs, of chandling and outfitting and overhauling as if on

the eve of departure, in the port of his study. Pride himself became inclined to long fits of abstraction, to an idle indifference to what I played, to conversations with me in which often I surmised he laid his hand on the veil of his intention and all but stripped it back. The white skin at his temples would heave, the long restless fingers that saw for themselves would rove and pry. I would come away from the study chilled and yet with the fascination growing on me, and my resolution taken to out with my curiosity in the morning. Yet when the morning came I would be

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spellbound with gazing and have no heart to question.

My curiosity in Miriam and my curiosity in Richard Pride were fortunate for now I had no recourse at all in my cantata. Janet was there, I could not forget the press of her palm on the wintered pages. There was routine work to be done, copying and scanning and filling out passages indicated in brief, labor that I held myself to from time to time with fretful painstaking. Then sometimes I would pick up once more the thick notebook of Richard Pride's and seek through it.

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... I was walking alone with Janet through a summer woods filled with the brightest of birds and the most lush frondage: a tapestry woods, bleached sunlight and thick leaf and angular rabbit and deer, a millefleur woods of the fourteenth century. Down a slope we seemed to be going hand in hand, quite silent and as in a trance, ourselves part of the tapestry, woven into it. Then we came to a clearing where the path swerved to the left under one branch of a beech tree on which was nailed a small crucifix of painted wood. Here was a small house of rubble stone with pointed roof and windows, all quite gothic, the door ajar.

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I stopped, but Janet loosed her fingers and walked on ... with a peculiar and most lovely swinging stride that swung her skirts from her hips ... without looking back, or calling farewell. I could not speak. Some necessity beckoned me to the little house. Presently when Janet had gone far into the woods, her hands held back on each side and her face lifted from me, I turned sorrowfully and went to the sagging door.

Within was a bare room floored with wide unpainted boards. Leaves had blown in and drifted across the floor with a dry rustle; and a squirrel in one corner cocked an eye at me, jerked his tail agitatedly and frisked away, leaving a scatter of nut-shells where he had been. On a table stood a platter and mug of heavy pewter, and a crust. There was a chair and a bed, ancient and rudely joined, such as I had never seen before. On the window sill fluttered a bird of rare and fantastic plumage, green and shimmering gold and red and blue; and on the bed lay a man.

Lids so thin they were almost transparent closed his eyes and his breath was slow and shallow so that I could barely discern the moving of his breast. Naked he lay. He was so emaciated that his gaunt skeleton seemed five bones in a sack of puckering

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skin. Adown his bosom streamed a tangle of gray beard and sparse gray locks fell back from his cold brow on the straw matting. He was on his back, arms and legs stretched, and leathern thongs knotted on each finger and toe held him to the four posts of the bed. Over him a rude netting had been drawn and I knew that this was to keep the bird from him, for while I looked it flew over from the window and circled above the smitten figure.

Now I understood that this was a hermit, bound thus of his own volition to mortify himself. But it seemed unnatural and evil to me, and I leaned over the pallet and unknotted the thongs and threw back the mesh. The old man opened his eyes and stared at me a moment with his purple eyes, and slowly then he smiled.

With my arm under his back I helped him to sit up, and finally with great pain and misgiving he essayed to stand. All this time a most extraordinary sensation was upon me; for it seemed that this forest, without a leaf stirring and yet alive, and all this prescient quietude and frozen ardience of the sun, and the old eremite himself wavering on his feet, and the bright bird that swerved around his head and perched on his shoulder and danced away again, and I myself watching—all this was music, without

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a sound. It was the prelude to *Die Meistersinger*, or rather it was the informing essence out of which the music proceeded. We were the music,

we were living it, we were in an actuality of tone, surging themes and opulent polyphony and crescendoes of magnificence.

Feebly, reaching from bedpost to table to support himself, the hermit made his way to the door, and he looked out for a moment on the lavish woodland, the free skies and the sweet dreaming paths beneath the trees. But the light hurt his eyes. Wincing he turned away, and back to his pallet he crept. He seemed to have aged a century above his age before, his strength could carry him no farther. And he lay down once more as he had been; and I, compelled and hushed, knotted once more the thongs on his fingers and toes and pulled the rough net over him.

With a wail the bright bird flew back to the window. And I ran out into the woods and down the gentle declivity after Janet, calling at last; but there was no sign of her anywhere and no answer to my call....

Here I awoke from the dream, and on the instant of awaking it seemed the whole moment was presented to me, was in my hands, in a few printed sheets. At the top was a name. It seemed to be

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a French name, and in French it would be spelled “Éliène.” but in my dream it was spelled *Ælien*....

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One afternoon when this new mood of idleness was on him I told the dream to Richard Pride. Gravely he listened and did not even smile when I laughed.

“Yes, to be sure, it may have originated in some story or poem,” he assented; “but I can’t recall any fiction with just such elements. Wherever it originated the interesting thing is that it is true. Dreams cannot lie. Consider the name, for instance; a very challenging and yet elusive name. Investigation, if you took pains to look far enough, would disclose unquestionably a real place or a real person who bore it, historic. Perhaps the spelling is altered, perhaps your pronunciation is wrong. It suggests a corrupt Latin. I’ve never encountered any name like it, so far as I can remember now, but on the evidence of a dream I would accept it as real.”

I thought of his speaking of an ancestral memory. “Then your explanation would be that some ancestor of mine went through some such experience

“That would be one way of putting it. But we are

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too circumscribed by habitual formulas of thought. We identify ourselves by the girth of our belts and the color of our hair and the craniums that go under our hats. Psychology someday will rid itself of this primitive conception and define a new identity, not metaphoric and not general, but actual and specific and precise. It will be an identity based on subconscious and not on any physiological constructure in time, with a street address. In this sense I would say that you yourself went through some such experience as this of your dream.”

It was hard for me not to smile. “At least the idea is original. But no experience of the kind can be quite so real as an experience in this ... this present parcel of flesh.”

“On the contrary, an experience of the kind, historically ancestral, can be just as real as any. You’re arguing from the chronological view of reality? Or perhaps better the consequential view. Certainly you will not be indicted for any misdeed already committed and expiated by your great-grandfather. The deed was atoned for a hundred years before your birth, and the New York courts on their present calendar will not be bothered with it. If you consider reality, however, from an emotional standpoint you must admit that an ancestral experience thus recalled

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in a dream may be real enough to give you a psychic trauma, or a symphony.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “but——”

“When you consider reality from a mnemosynic standpoint you will admit that all ancestral experience endures and is real in your being today, from its inception to its completion, rounded out and perfect. The generations are in you. The present parcel of flesh ... I like your phrase ... and the two score years in which it will serve you are but the meagre contribution you may make—this chronological you—to the vast biochemical you, the rainbow individuality which is in the last analysis one self.”

... All cold, symmetrical, like plate glass, like cut diamond. The long hands crept onward in their endless pursuit, as if now and then they would

have got loose from him, broken their tether; the pit sockets under the craggy brows fronted me with uncanny blind vision.

“But ... Mr. Pride, even if the theory is logically sound, how does it work? To what use can it be put? Who is going to don the rainbow?”

“Ah, the utility...” Richard Pride cleared his throat, his face lunged toward the window, he meditated a moment. “All of us learned one time to walk.

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I assure you I’ve had occasion to try the stilts of this rainbow. I have been able specifically to become for a limited period a figure of especial interest to me among my forbears. I’m reluctant to tell you the historic dates of his life. I was able to do this of course only by a concentration of energy quite enormous on the one purpose, a stemming and diverting of vital forces into a particular channel. Or, as some might say, a fine stretch of the imagination.

“Imagination.... How we misunderstand it! It has come to mean a flight and a refuge from reality. Dereistic thinking, Bleuler has called it. And actually it is, and in no poetic sense, a return to the abiding reality. It is affirmation instead of negation. It moves not in the mist but in the overlight.” ...

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So with some work and much brooding, with existence at Mordance Hall caught up and tense with foreboding, we drew on toward Christmas. Christmas ... *Dies natalis invicti*: of the Sun, God wot, and no Messiah. The time of the Saturnalia was at hand, that seven-day carousal when master and slave sat equal at table and nothing must be written or said that was not merry. Out of these pagan sources came Tomte Grubbe and Hans Trapp, St. Nicholas

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and Bonhomme Noël, Kris Kringle and Santa Claus, I reflected; and here this Christmas I would await them at Mordance Hall in the midst of my nightmare. What mirth would we have here? The parched skull of Richard Pride and his drifting hands, the sullenness of Miriam, the hysterical audacities of Janet and Del Prado. What a dismal prospect!

Last year had not been so dreary, and yet every physical circumstance was so much poorer! I remembered the basement lodging in Chicago's gray north side, threadbare and ingrained with soot, but with a hearth of my own and a few friends around it. And all evening long the coming and going of George the black janitor, emissary to a Wells Street bootlegger; and the grateful geniality of intoxication, and the songs presently; and then on that crisp night with the dry snow creaking underfoot the blithe procession to the cathedral for mass. One girl came home with me: light of love indeed, neither intelligent nor steadfast in any purpose, idling, going with tides, but very pretty and quite gracious, aware of her sex and holding the gift of it as it was, little animal, her finest contribution and her only utter joy. Such tentative mild love-making, and better than that such confidences and small lonely avowals as we lay quietly close together and watched the hearth-fire flicker low!

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And the Christmas before that? With half a smile I took a sheet of paper and jotted down the numbers of the years, thirty of them since my birth; and then for a moment I stared at the page confounded by its emptiness. Where indeed had I been those Christmases, each one so rich with joy or sorrow: with loneliness intensified a thousand fold by the careless companioning of other people by twos and fours, couples and whole companies; or with the selfish joy of friendship made infinitely more keen by the spectacle of others alone and dejected? Where had I been!

I counted them back from Chicago. I had been in Detroit the year before that. There I had gone to join the faculty of a conservatory, always hoping for that leisure to work out my own dreams which somehow I never found, and Christmas I had spent alone, seizing the respite of this one day for my own work. But I had been unable to work, I remembered; and eventually I strolled out of doors and roamed the streets until, bitter with loneliness and frustration, I ended in a barroom, getting drunk surly, chafing with impatience. And the year before that, New York, and Margaret. She had light hair, I think the most delicate hair my fingers ever touched or my breath warmed; and she was a musician too, with a facility that shamed my slow arduous toil in

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creation, so that I was always jealous of her. I think I loved her but I was jealous of her; I admired her, and she made me conscious of my sluggish wit, and I could accomplish nothing. This night we dined hilariously and planned to separate; and when our plans were resolved, we embraced each other frantically and abjured our cruel plans, protested anew our devotion for all time, knowing in our hearts that we had come nevertheless to the end of our way together. She married, I heard since, and has children.... Tonight, staring at my schedule of lost years, I felt suddenly very lonely for Margaret, very sad for the loss of what we had; and I sent her good wishes and love from my room beneath the eaves of Mordance Hall.

And then preceding that were three Noëls in Paris, and preceding them four in New York, my student years when all the grandisonant city was music to me. Oh, that first winter of revelation when it became mine, and I could not stay indoors, could never study, for joy of it! From end to end I explored it: from the cul-de-sac of Cherry Hill, a pit of turbid night in which deep one lantern sullenly flared, to the Spanish shops of Chelsea, to Tompkins Square and the gypsy women, Stuyvesant Square and the rolling of chant and organ-music from the wide doors of St. George's.... And before that?

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Back into my very childhood I pressed my examination of the years and I myself found, as had Richard Pride, how strangely tenacious memory is of even, such precise things as numbers and names. I recalled the street address of a house where we had lived when I was four years old and which I had not seen since; and as I wrote that down, surprised at the recovery, there came to my mind the face and the name of a little girl I had played with, and then on a moment's thought another name. So I discovered that, as long as I cared to dwell on a point in time, details of place and person would fill in the picture, one after another; and the thing presently would take on depth and stir and voice and color, and I would be almost there again, living my life as I had lived it.

Now what has become of these boys and girls, once so familiar to me, puzzling out with me the explanations and significances of life as it manifested itself more and more broadly to our wondering eyes, exchanging confidences, believing, and losing faith? They are somewhere, prosperous and contented perhaps, I reflected; they are wondering no longer. Or perhaps they are poor and wed to dismay, knowing that

something they loved has been lost beyond retrieving ever. Or maybe they are dead; and I remembered the shock when death first came close

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to me, taking my friend—drowned while swimming, on a holiday. Others of my friends are dead, I mused, and the names of them came back to me one by one. But I halted fairly appalled.

For I remembered that when I put down the numbers of the years and looked at the waiting sheet of paper it had seemed so tragically vain, so impossible to fill in, beyond perhaps the mere listing of places. The dark chamber of Richard Pride! To be sure, this is where he has gone and whither he is waiting for me to follow. It is the little door into a small closet, but when one enters the closet is found to be enormous. Or is it ... endless? Where is one to say it ends?

This is what Richard Pride means when he speaks of an ancestral memory. Going on into the dark chamber now, striding forward through the murk of it tirelessly with his little torch, seeking resolutely, he avers he has not yet come to the end. Why then, there may indeed be no end. One can at will step into the shadow and be a thousand years ago! Or ... ten thousand?

Where *would* one be, I marvelled, if one adventured back as far as one could? Then a thousand mocking voices, poltergeist and dusterswivel, mocked me with fantastic answers that I dared not hear....

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We were all expectant of something, we were nervous enough to startle at a sound in Mordance Hall and curse at a silence, but I think none of us would have been so bold as try to explain what it was we expected. Certainly we had not expected Richard Pride suddenly to withdraw from the house and take up his residence at the study, alone save for little Sally, the maid. It did not touch off the explosive but it set us wretchedly jangling.

She was a lean, slinking, pop-eyed little savage of fourteen, big for her age, very primitive. Mamie, the cook, was her mother and a native of the West Indies, full of superstition and voodoo as the West Indian negroes are; she scattered chase-away powder and mumbled orisons to a great gnarled root. A yellow nasal drone that seemed coiling with equatorial heat was

Sally's voice, her walk and the sinuous movement of her arms were catlike, and on occasion one detected a musky animal odor about her. She had been as insignificant as any lintel or rod in that household, where one's attention was focussed on those other figures of sinister or mysterious purport. Now she became an object of dominant interest and in a peculiarly morbid way.

All one night she wailed, the night before she

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dropped out of our distract community and took up her duties over the valley with Pride. I awoke from a comfortable sleep with her lamenting in my ears, and lit a candle and went to the window, where I ascertained the direction of the disturbance. Lights were at other windows too; the window of Janet's room down the main wing of the house was a pale yellow. Anywhere else, knowing Sally and her kind, I might have smiled and gone back to bed. But at Mordance Hall such an episode depressed one.

In the morning it was Mamie who waited on us, solemn and muttering and quite absent-minded so that Miriam, who was very irritable, rebuked her sharply. Meanwhile a bundle was made of Sally's few necessary things and before noon off she went following Hough through the woods, snuffling and scared. I did not care to watch the sorry spectacle. I was annoyed with myself for my perverse suspicions, my odd notion that the girl was being taken away for some inexplicable and scientific torture. I saw clearly enough that nothing unusual was indicated by Pride's wish to have a servant with him; and, knowing how engrossed he was in his researches, I could not reasonably seek another motive behind his expressed desire for seclusion with them in his study. Yet the doubt persisted....

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Miriam accosted me on my way upstairs. "Oscar, be generous! Come and play chess with me!"

She held out her closed fists and I tapped one indifferently. It held the black pawn. "Let us have a crazy game," she said, distributing her pieces swiftly. "Perhaps thus we will make some notable discovery—" and she opened with a preposterous advance of a knight. "Meanwhile please tell me something silly. I have the megrims."

It was difficult for me to respond to her gesture. I played my first piece as blindly as she. "But I have the megrims myself. I've been having bad

dreams. Is it always going to rain like this?"

"Always. Between here and the study. Mr. Pride has retired to his hermitage and we will see no more of him here for some time."

"I knew that." I did not mean to be surly, the words slipped from my mouth.

"Then you should have told me. Thus you would have been communicative, which is a virtue. Mr. Pride moreover is much absorbed in some studies the nature of which I'm sorry to say I can't explain to you. He prefers always to do his work first and then, when he is through, let me find out about it as best I can.... There goes my bishop."

I was not proud of the capture. Miriam too obviously employed the game to keep me with her and

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even, I thought, would have flattered me by allowing me to win. "They must be interesting studies. Aren't you curious?"

"No. Neither is Sally, the little slave girl, who is, I am able to inform you, taking up her abode similarly in the study. Mr. Pride now has Tod and Sally. It's almost a menagerie."

I played, fuming. Nothing in the world is so unpleasant as to be permitted to win a game. With a man I would have damned. With Miriam there was nothing to do but strive my hardest. Ignoring the impatient tattoo of her fingers on the board I deliberated each move. I sent my pawns pressing forward with the knights free in front of them and queen and bishops in close co-ordination. I ignored those casual openings that her scheme or her carelessness gave me and that would have disordered my steady invasion. I became aware that every time she moved a piece she would knock over her king's rook. The thing fixed my attention and exasperated me like the shrill of a whistle. Presently I put her queen, in check. She extricated the piece cleverly and ... toppled her rook as she drew her hand from the board.

Then I stopped, I thrust my hands in my pockets and leaned back in my chair and stared at Miriam full in the eyes. "Why are you doing that? You're

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letting me win. The implication is, at least, that I'm so stupid a player you can mock me. Is that what you mean?"

Miriam swept the board clean, swept the thirty pieces into her lap; and then began to arrange them anew, the white to me this time, herself defending. "I rather hoped you would swear," she remarked after a moment. "Come, this time I shall beat you, and then I expect you to swear. Something more than profane. Something that withers and blights. Then I shall scream and it will draw blood. Give me a cigarette."

There was no quitting for me, and I hardly think I would have abandoned the game now even had I seen my way to do it. Miriam excited me. Cautiously I opened and, as I apprehended, Miriam laughed. Reckless she brought her queen alone out on the board. "That is I. You observe, the king shuts himself up in his study. So much for the king. The queen is a wanton and is something of a Lucrezia moreover; she goes about seducing bishops and slaying knights. Or slaying bishops and seducing knights; she is very informal."

"She is at present in very grave danger," I commented, threatening the mad piece with my own prudent lady.

"She would rather enjoy being captured. The

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whirlwind bridled. What a joy there must be in imprisonment! To beat oneself against stone walls!" Her queen was out of my clutch in a moment, guarded and in her turn menacing me. "She consults with her sorcerers and concocts potions. She weeps for her triumph. What a pity that there is nobody in the world who will conquer her and can! She will never love anybody but her executioner. Do you know any hangmen?"

Her rant disconcerted me and the swift impulsiveness of her moves, so that I had to force myself again to be calm. And then, becoming silent, she played for fifteen minutes such a game of chess as I have never seen. I am far from expert, but clear-sightedness means much in chess. Some of her intentions I could foresee and without much difficulty obstruct; but out would come her queen and rend great paths into my forces. It was I, now, with the white that defended, while her aggressions circled dizzily around me and flanked and harried and crushed me across the board. Her checkmate, with most of my pieces still standing, came like a stroke in sleep. For minutes I could not believe it and studied the board amazed. It was true, clear, geometrical, perfect. When my bewilderment subsided I exclaimed in admiration.

Miriam's breath came in a gasp. She rested her

chin in her palm and she too examined the field as if fascinated by her own success. "Oscar, the glory is yours. It was a good mate, wasn't it? That compliments one's opponent. You made me do well and ... it was quite a brilliant coup. Please play with me often. I'll become some sort of champion, perhaps."

"I can't understand even now how you did it. Yes, indeed, it was a most brilliant game."

She was putting the heavy, handsome chessmen into their box. "But Oscar," she said, her whole manner suddenly changing, "I wish you would do something for me. You may think it absurd of me to ask, and no doubt it is. But ... I am worried about Sally. You know I'm responsible for her to some extent."

"Why ... with Sally's mother here I should think your responsibility would be very small indeed. And yes, I think it is absurd to worry. What could happen to her?"

"Nothing, of course, so far as Mr. Pride is concerned. Don't think I distrust him." She pondered. "It's more herself I fear. She's a superstitious little heathen and ... that place may get on her nerves. Don't you see? Well, all I want you to do is let me know from time to time how she behaves. How she seems to adapt herself. It's for Mr. Pride's sake as

much as for my own, and hers, that I ask this of you. It would be so ... distressing if anything happened."

I assured Miriam that I would keep her informed; and then I went upstairs at last to my own room and my own thoughts; and the more I considered her request the more obvious it seemed to me that her purpose was not so simple as she professed. It seemed obvious that she cared not a whit about Sally and all of Sally's tribe, and that it would not have meant more than a moment's vexation whatever grewsome eventuality might come to pass over there at the study. But she intended something far more important to her own enigmatic understanding of things than any slight information I could give her would be....

And alone in my room, too, thinking over that episode with Miriam, it occurred to me just how she had managed her brilliant mate. She had moved her queen unfairly from one file to another; and I had been too

bemused by the glint of her swift fingers and the extravagance of her apostrophe and the proximity of her amazing self to perceive the treachery....

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Two rods off the highroad I came one day, prowling through fog and mud with my thoughts of

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Janet, on the small silent ruins of a house: a loose foundation of heavy field stones beneath two gigantic spruces, and the mouth of a well gaping at one side. I gazed down over the crumbling coping and a fathom below the ground level was a surface of brown-green water beneath which the depths of the well were hid. How still it was! I dropped a pebble and the little plop as it struck the water echoed cavernously from stone to stone. Envenomed the water was no doubt, that purulent green, filled with slow malevolent thought, memory of tragedy, undercurrent of sighs and terrors and hauntings, triste and inflamed. Here lies buried the wrystone; it is tended here by maidens with hair gray as Spanish moss and breasts moss-green.

Preyed upon by my reverie I turned away from those ruins and set off once more into the clinging fog. I walked an aimless distance that passed a black trunk twisted in grotesque gnarled shapes, and turning with the path I saw Miriam. Only for a moment I saw her, she was very tall and attenuated and waved slowly back and forth in the fog like a rush in moving water; on her face was a faint mirthless smile, her hands were folded on her bosom. Then the apparition dissolved into the mist.

Feeling feverish and uneasy I hurried back to Mordance Hall and went to my room. There I threw

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myself on my bed and tried to sleep, but my heart pounded, my fingers were dry and rubbed together like silk, my lips were parching. When it came time for dinner I sent word by Hough, who stopped at my door, that I was indisposed.

An hour later Miriam came. She entered without knocking and sat on the bed at my side and laid her fingers on my brow. "Yes, you have a temperature." She put her candle on the table and with a hand each side of

my pillow leaned above me and looked a long time into my eyes. I wanted to tell her that I had discovered her unfairness in our game of chess, but I could not say anything; it was as in a dream and I could only return her gaze. Her bosom was quite close to mine, her breath was on my face. Presently she bent still lower and her mouth pressed against mine, her hair brushed my brow. She held me thus. When at last she stirred, and drew back, and arose to her feet, she walked not treading the floor, noiselessly; and I watched the eclipse of her candle behind my door, and went to sleep.

But in the morning when I awoke, clear-minded now and quite myself, I could not say whether it was a dream or reality, that Miriam paid me a visit. At breakfast Miriam greeted me with a cool inquiry as to my health. I said I was well.

Yes, it had been a dream, I assured myself, born

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of fever and anxiety and my suspicion of that dark beautiful woman, the madness and exacerbations of Mordance Hall. Her white teeth would not bite, it was *her own* life in her lips. I loved Janet and I was beside myself with anguish at her obscene infatuation for Del Prado, her cruel denial of me. I would tell Miriam about that and beg her to mother my desires. I would point out the smickering of the Spaniard and his unworthiness, and Miriam would help me.... So I pondered.

But one afternoon I heard Miriam singing somewhere about the house in a queer voice of a reedy, oboe timbre. She was singing a song that seemed to have no words and that rose and fell in languid portamento through green chromatic intervals, so that I thought of the Lorelei and again of the underwater and how the sun would come slanting to one that drowns. I went to seek Miriam because her singing had such magic, and I could find her nowhere.

And one night I turned the knob of my door and stepped into my room, and stopped in dismay for it was not my room I had entered but Miriam's. She greeted me with her eyes.

With a glance she commanded me and I pulled the door shut behind me and stood. Surely this was not Mordance Hall, this fantasy in color! Purple were the walls and gold the ceiling, and on the gleaming

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black floor were rugs of deep scarlet like pools. All around were flowers, enormous white lilies and tiger-lilies out of some anthomaniac's hothouse, vocal with vermilions. Over the fire place hung the Tyrolean saint ... stark, beard draggling over one swelling breast, and the golden slipper, and the minstrel at the foot of the cross ... and a single candle burned at each side of the painting. On the hearth was a fire of black logs; incense had been sprinkled on them and drifted into the room in swirls of narcotic smoke. On the rug before this fire knelt Miriam clad in a shift of black silk through which breast and flank were apparent in subtle glow and luminousness, and her fingers wove sinuous patterns like those of Burmese hierophants.

Was it an hour I watched? When. I awoke again in my own room in the morning I could not tell; again I could not make certain if I had dreamed or really had blundered into that room, and watched Miriam do her magic, and fallen asleep with drugged odors.

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... Shamash and Sin, the priests of Babylon called them, peering at them from their high places to ascertain the morrow's dole: Nebo and Ishtar, Nergal, Ninib and Marduk. Nergal and Ninib, bitter

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stars of calamity! When prophecy passed to the Greeks they were not mistaken: Pyrois the fiery one now swung his hateful flame, Phœnon the cruel one crawled staring and yellow his malevolent way. But the Romans gave us the names by which our science knows the stars, less cravenly but marvelling no less: Mercury and Venus, Mars and Saturn and Jupiter. And then comes a curious chapter of star-worship in the church, leaving its record on ancient missal and mural painting, and championed by devout men century after century against the prudence of others who shrank from the aspersion of astrolatry. Here the stars take Hebraic names; it is Uriel and Barachiel who stride the skies, Mikael and Gabriel, Raphael and Scaltiel and Jehudiel. In a famous Bull of a hundred years ago Pius V rejoices in the restoration in Christianity of the cult of the seven ardent lights. And they are ... Shamash and Sin, Nebo and Ishtar, Nergal, Ninib and Marduk.

One can laugh at astrology, one can do nothing but laugh until one knows something about it. But when one reads into the history of it, in all

its strange glamorous byways, one looks at least with new interest on the stars at night. They have been so much! And sometimes still the coincidences of them are quite tempting....

“Oscar, you let us go by your birthday without

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cake or congratulations!” Miriam smiled. “Why didn’t you tell us?”

It surprised me at first; but I must have mentioned it inadvertently to Janet one day, I reflected, and Janet must have spoken of it to Miriam. “It’s sweet of you. But you see, I hadn’t been here so very long then.”

“You’d been here nearly two months.”

“Really, not much more than one month! And it would have been an impertinence to say anything about it.”

“Oscar ...” Miriam gazed at me quizzically, and still half amused, and yet half serious. “Tell me when you were born. I’ve been playing with the stars, and I made a guess.”

So I told her the day and the year. I had no notion of the hour.

“Indeed. Then I was ... probably not wrong at all. Would you like to see? We can judge from a sharp thing that happened, I would say, when you were five. Come, I am a sorceress; haven’t you found that out? When you were five your nursemaid hurt you. I believe she tried to strangle you. In a mad fury. Do you remember?”

“No!” And I chuckled. “Really, I don’t think ever in my life I had a nurse. We were too poor.”

She was busy with pencil and paper, scratching

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in queer symbols around a large circle surrounding a small one, referring now and then to a book of tables. “These, you see, are the constellations as they were in the sky when you were born, relative to your birthplace. And here, inside, are the planets as they were that moment, their beams striking your cradle directly or from an angle, mingling together and so assorting their favors. Do you see? Do you want to know the very minute of your birth?” She made a brief calculation. “Seven-thirty it was by sun time; and standard time in New York would be some four minutes earlier. So we will say seven-twenty-six.” Again she smiled.

But I was interested by such precision. “How would you reckon it?”

She explained, pointing here and there on the chart with her pencil. "I knew you. I knew your appearance—neither very large nor small, with your oval face and your light hair and generous eyes. I knew you were a musician. There are several odd correspondences in the horoscopes of musicians, Oscar. Venus in them. You should love Venus, watching her in the morning or the evening; she is evening star now, setting long after the sun. Venus, when she is in what is called a fiery constellation, such as Sagittarius, predisposes a child to music; particularly when she is closely related in her position to other

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vitalizing planets. And musicians have likewise quite frequently an omen that everyone wouldn't consider favorable: Uranus, in the constellation Scorpio.... Does all this bore you?"

I shook my head quite eagerly. It kindled me to watch the procession of those symbols which, when all is laughed away and the follies of astrology are declared in their absurdity, remain astronomically true, the locations of the stars at a certain moment. Thus they shone the night I was born. The Sun had set, the Moon down with him. Blue Vega burned augustly half into the west, the Swan behind her swam in the zenith. On the last ember of sunset stood the Archer, and there, great throbbing celestial heart, swung Venus. And I thought, Perhaps my father stepped for a moment out of doors, when the travail was done, and saw the golden star and blessed her in his new serenity. Thus the sky shone.... "I'm enjoying it very much. Please go on."

"And then in addition I saw that soon, this year and this month, very soon now, something threatened you that more or less I had been expecting. So, when I had made these positions, I calculated back to the moment of your birth."

... "What's going to happen?" I asked.

Quizzically she looked at me. "It may not happen. The stars, they say, forewarn but never compel.

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One may benefit by the warning." She mused a moment. "Let me tell you a story. There are romances in the stars; let's say this is only a romance. So

...

“Here is a little boy. He is the child of a dutiful, chaste, god-fearing woman of the old fashion, good wife and mother, bringing fidelity and tact as contribution to her marriage with a man of liberal heart and sound if vulgar virtues; he might have made a respected magistrate. His ardor soon subsided. Hers, beneath her apparent acceptance of the rôle of mother and rather frustrate bride, persisted in a passion for music. This she gave her son. She found him most responsive. She would even discipline him with music. It would be enough to play some tender piece on the piano to bring him, weeping and penitent, out of one of those fits of stubbornness and mischief into which he would fall. For he was very restless and nervous, afraid of the dark, imaginative and lonely.... Sweet little boy.”

I laughed with embarrassment. “You have a wild imagination, but you do come as near the truth as tea-leaves.”

“I’m reading a story.... And the next chapter is about our little boy growing into his youth, and having a hard struggle against poverty and lack of appreciation. See, how all the prosperous planets are low? Yet Neptune, when he was born, was in the

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constellation Gemini; and Neptune means genius, and Gemini means the equipment to express genius. Pianists have Gemini prominent in their horoscopes. It would excite you, Oscar. Chopin had, so did Schumann. But Schumann’s horoscope is startling, it really is. For Mars forecasts to the day the injury to his hand which ruined his career as a virtuoso....

“Yes, there are some very challenging coincidences in the stars....

“But Neptune. Look, Oscar. Here is the Moon, a third of the way around the heavens from him; and here, sixty degrees from the Moon are Venus and Uranus, close together. So in a vast triangle their rays were blended upon the little boy’s birth, and the glory of the Sun himself confirmed them; and some day he will be very great.

“Also, here is Uranus in Scorpio, as in the horoscope of Schumann too, and Wagner, and some other musicians. It isn’t very benign, that hysterical planet in so fleshly a sign. I wonder, was Schumann ever unhappy in love? Wagner of course was not. The pothet with Minna could not have been love. I think Wagner understood women as Liszt did and took them for what they are. Springboard, from which to leap. Poor Chopin tried to carry his springboard with him into the empyrean, and he suffered of course when he failed.

"So in this story the youth is inclined to try to take the springboard with him when he leaps. The stars move in their courses, every year they bring new aspects to bear on us.... Oscar, do I weary you?"

"No, no; but ..." I sat back uneasily, trying to catch myself out of this gibberish of pricking stars in a forgotten sky, which seemed nevertheless to be prodding my heart.

"It interests me. You see—" and Miriam bent gravely over her toy "—about the beginning of this year, reckoning from birthday to birthday, an influence began to exert itself on the youth which wrapped itself close into his dreams. Yet it was a very, very evil influence on him. Do you see, here? Uranus? and here Mars? And it is approaching a tragic dénouement, if he can't prepare against it. The Sun goes into eclipse in Capricorn on December 23, and Saturn and Mars are full of wickedness, and thus the tragedy comes to pass. I should say that the girl ... Oscar ... departs, in a manner quite painful to the youth, quite contemptuous of him."

Between wrath and belief, wrath over what seemed to me an obvious token of prying and interference, and belief that my torment urged upon me, I clenched my fists against my cheeks and held fast my mouth.

But coolly, reading her novel, impersonal as water, Miriam was continuing. "Does great art come out of anguish, or in spite of it? I'd say in spite of it. It hurts, to lavish beauty on a jilt. The young man will come nigh madness. Look, Oscar, how Neptune is stricken and Mercury too! But if the young man can endure, if he can harden himself and see what his lady really is, if he can put her aside with scorn and self-confidence, then ... within the year he will achieve a great vision. See, the Sun, Oscar! He reaches midheaven in a decade! That will be fame and prosperity, infinite fulfillment and enough prosperity. The world does love beauty at heart. How foolish not to save one's beauty for the world! And the boy's mother \_\_\_\_\_"

"My mother is dead!" I blurted. There was a tangible error. It saved me. I was unstrung and my breath labored unreasonably, and this would deliver me from the spell of her maundering divinations, pointed I could not doubt with malice.

But with hardly a second's pause, tapping her pencil between her teeth, her eyes on her chart, she went on: "—would have told him the same thing, if she had lived. She died when he was ... seventeen. I should say quite suddenly, in an accident, while travelling. Mars, here, do you see? afflicting ..." 149

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That evening after dinner I whispered to Janet and she was gracious and joined me on the terrace, and for a little we walked silently muffled in our greatcoats and thoughtful.

"I haven't bothered you for days and days, my dear," I said at last, "because you gave me to understand that I'd be intruding." She put her hand on my arm and drew closer to me but did not reply. "Now, I'm not going to ask you to do anything or be anything you don't want to, I won't plead with you. But I've been watching you and wondering if you were happy. Are you happy, Janet?"

"No, of course not. Have I ever been?"

"You seemed unhappy to me. Oh nothing in particular, but just the confusion and raving of this place. I remember many things you've said to me. And I wanted to know if I could help you? in any way at all?"

"Oscar, what could you do? I'm a tatter of wind. Bearing a pestilence. All one can do is get out of my way, if one is clever enough to foresee where I'm blowing. I'm not so clever."

"Love—" I began, but she exclaimed and I held my peace. When we had gone a few steps, "I talked

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with Miriam this afternoon," I said. "She read my horoscope. What an imposture astrology is!"

"Do you think so?"

"She looked at the chart and told me ... all sorts of things. Some of them were generalities that anyone could guess, knowing me: the character reading, that part of it. One or two episodes she must have unearthed somewhere. For instance, my mother's death. She told me the year my

mother died and the manner of her death. I wondered if I had ever mentioned it to you, and if incidentally you could have spoken of it to her?"

"No, not that I remember. I would remember, if it was peculiar in its circumstances, wouldn't I?"

"Yes, doubtless. But no matter. She went on next to forecast the future, and she told me things that were not surmise and that no one could have betrayed to her, I think. They seemed to indicate a rather ... May I speak quite frankly?"

"To a wind? Of course."

"A rather meddlesome interest in my affairs. She expatiated on some evil influence, a love that might hurt me to madness, which she said came to bear on me when I arrived at Mordance Hall and which very soon would reach a tragic conclusion. She urged me to put it out of my heart. As if one could put love out of one's heart! She admonished me to spurn

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from my heart the lady of it, because, she warned, that lady is planning to abandon me in a manner most painful and contemptuous. She ... has observed that I love you, Janet, and she is trying in this roundabout way to frighten me. Why should she do this? I love you. I expect nothing from you, I'll never annoy you, and if I keep hoping that's my privilege. I love you."

Janet touched my hand with the tip of a finger. "You don't mean to imply that I asked her to do such a thing, I know, Oscar."

"No, no! That would be contemptuous, wouldn't it? And you'll never treat me with contempt."

"But Oscar ... my dear Oscar, if I may speak frankly with a song ... I am going away. I think I'm going away." She laughed an abrupt shrill laugh. "Don't you believe the stars? My moon is a rover. My moon is in the Ninth House. I'm going away, and the devil knows where. Like a lost mind."

Now an explanation I had seen dimly became violently clear to me and I cursed. "No by God! She's been reading your horoscope, too! She's been predicting that you are to depart, and you, poor baffled child, believe her! She's a very fiend, Janet! This is the subtle way she takes to make one do her will! She knows that you yourself, convinced of the inevitability of the stars, will destroy yourself to make

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her forecast come true! Good God, what duplicity! And you shall not go, Janet! You must not go!"

"Oscar, Oscar, Oscar! Please, be quiet, think. What motive could she have to get rid of me?"

"I don't know. I haven't any faintest notion of her motives, but I do know ..." On my very tongue was word of that midnight scene between Miriam and Hough, but Janet interrupted me.

"It was not Miriam who told me I should go. It was Ramón. I'm going with him."

... "Ramón!"

She nodded assent. "Yes, Ramón. But—" sharply and warily "—that is our secret. You must not repeat it. I've told you because ... you do seem to love me, I want you to understand, I don't want you to think I am contemptuous of you. Even Miriam doesn't know this. You must forget it."

"Even her stars don't reveal everything!" I was quite bitter; but I fell silent, I held her hand very close to my breast, her small fair hand lying on my arm; and so we walked together a little longer....

But Janet was saying, "You're growing sick too, very sick, Oscar. The poison is working in you. Haven't you ever looked at Wilfred Hough and suspected something morbid and blighting and corrupting that has seized him?" I could feel a tremor shake down her body. "You talk to me as if I were

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real, an individual, free and responsible. I'm nothing. I'm a name in Richard Pride's mouth. Which he spits out.... When I was born the sun was in eclipse." ...

From over toward the study, where Richard Pride brooded and little Sally no doubt cringed and wailed and the mystery squatted obscene, came the bay of Tod.

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Three days before Christmas Richard Pride left Mordance Hall, going to Quebec to consult with a psychiatrist of some renown. He would be back, he explained, perhaps before New Year's.

"I have wondered much these last few weeks whether we have made you contented here," he said. And when I hesitated to reply, wondering

myself at my clinging to this mad place, wondering how much he knew of those envenomed currents of cross-purpose and desire which pulsed about us, he continued: "I would like you to know, Fitzalan, that in spite of what may seem to you an indifference on my part I have come to depend on you really a great deal. Not only for your actual assistance, the value of which I should like to make you understand more fully, but also for your ability to respect the singleness of intent that carries a man on lifelong to the

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completion of his task. It is a rare quality, you will admit. One finds it in an occasional scientist or artist, in men who sacrifice comfort and ignore rewards in order to devote themselves to their research. I have not felt always that the people about me were of that type."

"... I admire your persistence," I stammered. "I don't know that I can accept the compliment to myself," I added miserably, remembering my wasted *Helion*, my weeks of sterile languishing. "And ... you see, I have such a slight understanding of just what you are striving for. I might be of more aid if I comprehended more broadly." ... It was as if he were dictating my words. I did not feel them; on the contrary I writhed with impatience and all my intelligence clamored to be through with Pride and his designing in one wrench....

He nodded. "I hope you are satisfied, because when I return I am going to have an immediate and intimate need of you; it would be a calamitous disappointment to me if I could not count on you. For I believe I am on the threshold of an experience which will finally define the borders of that thesis I have been so many years trying to establish. I have gathered some material through the investigations of Del Prado, I am not yet through with him but shall be shortly, and then I believe it will be opportune to

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take you deeply into my confidence and proceed with your help ... in a way possibly beyond the scope of your art, but not beyond the scope of your temperament as an artist."

... Del Prado. If I could only tell Richard Pride now about Del Prado; about Janet and her confusion and despair, her resentment toward him, her father; about the hawk in Hough's breast, the gull in Miriam's! Now when he appealed to me I could appeal to him! But the phrases clotted on my tongue, I could only moisten my lips and wait.

“So, before I leave, I would like to know whether I can rely on you absolutely to stay with me, through the spring at least. I would like you to tell me if there is anything further I can do to provide for your comfort and contentedness here.”

I shook my head.

“Very good. It may be a source of satisfaction to you to know that you will witness an experiment which may mark a distinction in ways of thought no less terrible in its grandeur than that indefinite distinction which some have tried to describe as the breathing of spirit into the beast-man: the distinction between anthropoid and human being.” The gray skin at his temples throbbed like agony and dimly I could see his lips twist into a straight blue scar....

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When I came out of the study and entered the woods Miriam was there. She was striding downhill toward me and I observed in spite of my preoccupation the smooth undulous ease of her body, drifting over the uneven path as freely as down any carpeted corridor. “I’ve been looking for you all over,” she said. “Mamie has been having dreams and visions and the chase-away powder has given out. What has been happening to Sally?” Slipping her arm through mine she turned with me toward the house.

“Sally has been rummaging among the curios. She found herself a new dress, red with copper bangles. I think she is becoming reconciled to her lot. Meanwhile, I suppose you know that Mr. Pride is going away?”

“Thanks. Of course in time I should have been informed. When it gets to the actual point of departure Mr. Pride customarily says farewell.... Oscar, I’m glad to have you here.”

“Well, I’m going to stay.” And I told her briefly what Richard Pride had said to me; except that for some reason I hesitated to reveal what he had suggested about his expectations. “And so therefore your stars were partly right. At least in regard to myself.”

“But in regard to the lady?” Miriam looked straight ahead; she might have been avoiding my

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stare, one could not say. “It occurs to me, my dear Oscar, that Saturday is Christmas. Would you prefer little pig or turkey?”

“Miriam, what the devil difference does it make to me whether Saturday is Christmas or doomsday? Frankly I’m sick with mystification ... this feeling of things going on that I know nothing of ... and that concern me. For heaven’s sake, what does it all mean? What are you aiming at in your stargazing? What is the tragedy that hangs over me and that you pretend to see in the sky? What have you against me and what does Richard Pride want with me and what ... what *is* the whole nightmare of Mordance Hall?”

“My dear boy!” Miriam glanced at me with a smile. “Your hair wants combing and your cheeks are apoplectic. You are fast becoming one of us. Let’s see if I can enlighten you. The nightmare is the home of Richard Pride. Richard Pride is ... God knows what: the other enigma. Eventually we’ll all find out, if we don’t pop out some day with a flash and a bang. If there are sermons in stones there must be terrors in gunpowder. We are a cartridge in a musket and somebody might touch the trigger ... if we ask too many questions. Ask no questions and when the opportunity presents forget that you want to. I’m going to town this afternoon,

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otherwise I should consult the stars. It’s a profitable study. They never lie....”

Too vexed to brave the possibility of encountering Janet or Ramón I went to my room. Here again was the threat of eruption, of just such a nerve-wrenched catastrophe as Janet had foreseen that ruddy September evening when we drove together to the Syrian place and quaffed the white drug and talked. Upon my soul I could not make head nor tail of it, I could find no light or reason in this gibber and glooming and bemistedness; and I lighted a cigarette and sprawled on my bed and puffed, trying to distinguish among so many uncertainties those certain things I could be sure of.

Janet I loved, no uncertainty in that. She was in my music. She was a fugitive dissonance that sought an impalpable tonic, someday to be resolved. I loved her and I believed. Credo: I shall in the end possess her.... And Richard Pride? I thought a moment on Richard Pride remembering many things: the night of the blizzard when I had come on him and Tod; the journal of the beginnings of this endeavor of his, so queerly spectral and luring and ominous; the emptiness of his marble countenance and the untiring stray of his hands; the welded tenacity of his purpose, certain indeed though nothing

else were! Everything that is done at Mordance Hall is a broken blade beneath an oak, each of us here is a pebble in an avalanche, beside the purpose of Richard Pride.... And Miriam? Ah, with many forebodings I thought of Miriam; and I knew that nothing she professed was genuine, that beneath every gesture and word fermented her purpose no less cruel than Richard Pride's; and I knew that she was the most circean woman in all the world....

Then my door opened without a knock and Wilfred Hough came in.

There had been little intercourse between Wilfred Hough and myself from the very beginning, and after the night when Tod held me in the music room and willy-nilly I overheard Hough's hysterical colloquy with Miriam my distrust had widened the gaping uncongeniality that separated us. And since the growth of my hateful and englamored companionship with Miriam I had been still more distant toward the secretary. On occasion we would meet at the study, and noons and evenings we sat at the same table, but there was no spiritual meeting at all. Now his rude entrance filled me with resentment.

Abruptly I got to my feet. "Good afternoon! Is this an emergency? As a rule it is better to rap before you go into another man's room. And safer."

Always before I had seen Hough obsequious. Perhaps that night with Miriam he had not been, but I had not seen him that night; the red welt left by her whip still glowed on his drained cheek. But now he did not fawn in the least, the surliness that lurked in his gaze had overmastered the fearfulness that had kept it in check. With a wave of his hand he dismissed my challenge and coolly dropped into a chair.

"In a sense, yes, it's an emergency," he explained. "I wanted to talk to you and I foresaw the possibility you might not want to talk to me. It'd be easier to get inside first and then consult your wishes, it might save me the effort of pushing past you. Have a smoke?"

Hough's boldness astonished me, until I detected the reek of liquor. "Thanks," I said, motioning away his proffered package of cigarettes. "I'll have one of my own. What's the emergency?"

For a dozen breaths he deliberated, staring at his cigarette. "Oscar ... we're very peculiar people at Mordance Hall. It's possible you wouldn't

have come here if you'd known as much about us as you do now. You've got a lot more to learn and it's more ... upsetting than what you have learned so far. Don't you think it'd be wise for you to ... take this chance and ... skip?"

I might have struck him, so incensed was I; but

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the knowledge he had been drinking, and the realization of his physical frailty, and my curiosity to hear what he might confess in his intoxication, all restrained me. "Well, it might be prudent. But I'm under a disadvantage. I haven't yet learned, as you point out, that further distressing information which would make the wisdom of leaving apparent. You may advise me ..."

"Unfortunately, no, I'm not prepared to go into that. You ought to know already that your presence has caused some unpleasant complications. Quite candidly ... Miriam."

Now I wanted first to laugh and then to be at this anemic plotter of garrotings. "Hough—" and I took a step toward him "—I don't like that. You know, or if you don't know you'll have to take my word for it before you leave this room, that my relations with Mrs. Pride have been dignified and respectful. I admire Mrs. Pride extremely, that is true. Beyond that your insinuations are ... nasty."

My threat Hough seemed not to notice. "Yes, I believe you admire her. I too admire Miriam. Oscar, I admire her a great deal." He flicked his cigarette into the fireplace and put his hands on the arms of his chair as if he would rise in defiance. "I admire Miriam so much that I myself am particularly eager to have you get out of here. This is only in an indirect

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way related to your welfare. I don't give a damn if you croak. I want you to get the hell out of here."

"You're drunk! You're drunk and you're insane, and you can be quite sure that I'm not going to run away whenever you come spouting infamies at me and ordering me to leave. You're a God damned cad!"

With a smile of depreciation he relaxed back into his chair. "All right." He contracted upon himself a moment, fighting to recover his control. "All right, Oscar. Maybe I am a cad. Did you ever stop to think that once a cad realizes his own capacities he may get to be ... quite superb? Look at

Napoleon ..." Now at last he pulled himself erect. "Yes, I'm drunk. I'm drunk as hell. It's a thing to do now and then, I like it." Swaying he stood, so gray that I was afraid he might collapse on my floor. "Oscar, I've told you to go away from Mordance Hall. I've warned you not to love Miriam. In my own way I'm quite capable of doing what you're afraid I might do." Staring at me his face clenched in a spasm of hatred. "You better quit. Whatever you think of me, I don't care, you better quit this place. It's dangerous for you to be seen as I've seen you, so intimately with Miriam."

"Wilfred," I exclaimed, "you mean little spider,

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you spewer of poison, that's enough from you! I've heard you make threats before. What about your threat to kill Richard Pride? The night Miriam slashed you with her whip? Why, I think it's about time for you to leave Mordance Hall. Yes, I think you'd better get out of here. I think——"

Infuriated I was advancing on him, I was growing blind with fury, when a peal of laughter sounded below my window. I stopped ... and glanced out. Pride was getting into the car with his bags, and giving him an arm was Del Prado, and at the wheel was Miriam. But on the terrace Janet remained, waving good-bye to the three; and the car lurched away, and she turned alone back into the house.

"Or ..." I laughed, "you can stay here. Right here." I leaped to the door. "When I feel more like talking with you we may resume the discussion. You'll be a little more sober by then."

With the mockery of a bow I went out; I locked the door behind me and waited a moment amused at Hough's thumping and cries. Through oaken door and battlement walls they would not be heard far.... Downstairs Janet was humming some song.

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She saw me coming downstairs, she waited for me smiling just inside the door, and when I drew near

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suddenly she threw her arms around me and kissed me. "I feel devils. I feel faithless. It was Ramón ten. minutes ago. When I kiss him again I shall be faithless once more. Athanaël, give me a lesson in music!"

I laughed, and held her to me with my hands on her hips. "Wilfred has been drinking. He came to my room raving accusations and threats. I locked him up. Now by God we're going to drink. Come on, we'll find his rum." Perhaps she had thought to mock me, counting on my reticence. She wavered irresolute at my readiness. "Come on, you feel devils, let us be them. Then perhaps we'll have devilish music."

This time it was I kissed her, until she struggled away and stood off from me, breathing fast. "Ah ... Jesus! This is the corruption of Saint Serapion. He was a queer boy. I never could believe it was nothing but prayers he chanted when the lady beckoned. In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night. I'm old-testamental: curiously phrased and full of iniquities.... I hope Wilfred has lots."

Drunk already we went together back up the ancient stairs. Glancing over the balustrade I glimpsed the naked thigh and the gleam of the serpent's stare from the painting above the hearth. In a corner the old clock struck the half-hour and I heard how empty

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was the great house. "Yes, we are nothing, we have all gone off to Quebec. We are nothing but ... bodies. The mind has been lifted from us; we are only bodies."

"Yellow shadows. Richard has strayed to the wrong side of the sun."

Down the corridor we hurried toward Hough's room. The door gaped loosely. Janet pushed through ahead of me, and just within we stopped to survey the room. Tumbled was the bed, the pillows disordered, as if Hough had threshed there in a fever. On the wide antique writing table the litter of books and papers ... scattered and neglected even as mine had become, I reflected ... had been pushed aside from one corner. Here were a bottle and two empty glasses.

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "Wilfred would seem to have had company."

Janet went to the desk and picked up the small crumple of a woman's handkerchief. "He's been entertaining Miriam," she agreed, tossing me the little piece of fine cambric. In one corner was embroidered delicately an initial. "She came, it would appear, while the young man was preparing himself for such a deed of daring as take a drink." Janet examined a book which had been laid by, face down to mark the page. "These are exercises to develop one's will.

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Wilfred has already advanced to page 138 and doubtless is far along toward mastery of his soul. I have no doubt at all that at her first rap he arose without a tremor, admitted her, placed for her this chair, poured a potion and tossed it off. We'll have to contend yet some day with Wilfred."

I tucked the kerchief in my pocket and my heart shouted for triumph. Here indeed was proof of collusion, the warmth of her fingers hardly cooled from the fabric! Then I sniffed the bottle. "This is that Syrian stuff."

"Araq." She nodded. "It is distilled from great red grapes and flavored with wormwood. It turns into white clouds that float in one's eyes and fingers and breasts."

We drank gulping the liquor nervously avid.

"Poor Wilfred! To think that never before have I been interested enough in him to pry!" Janet scanned the room contemptuously. "Even when I thought I was interested. But there is a sort of dregs of baptistism in it that feebly stirs me to blasphemy." She jerked open a trunk and gazed into it.

"It's pathetic," I contradicted. "This drug, and the will-power book, and the bed so fretted."

The trunk slammed shut, and back to the table came Janet dancing. Now she took the bottle, and she filled the tumblers half full of the fierce liquor.

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"Let's hunt sacrilege, there is none here. I'll carry the araq. Where are we going? Let's violate privacies."

"We might," I proposed, "have our next drink in Miriam's room."

Janet regarded me smiling. Then when once more we had emptied our glasses she led the way back down the corridor to the balcony and around. The drink was warming me, the fury in which I had started that afternoon fed on it and leaped into conflagration. Before Miriam returned I would solve one mystery and through it several others, I mused. I would know whether I had been ill or hypnotized, the night I stumbled through a door and found Miriam at her incantations. In the kerchief I had already evidence of her scheming; she had set Wilfred on to challenge me, she would drive me away from Janet, away from Mordance Hall in spite of her protestations. Once coldly I had seen her chamber with its claptrap paraphernalia and erotic decorations I would never again feel the neurotic dread of her that obsessed me. Expectantly I followed Janet through another door, and ... gazed with surprise on the chaste and matronly apartment which lay beyond it.

Highboy and dressing table with long pier-glass and toilet set of luxurious silver neatly arranged on

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the doily of rich linen, poster bed, walnut arm-chair with tapestried footstool: it was such a chamber as the lady of the manor should have indeed, but such as I could not imagine Miriam tenanting. On the wall full in the sunlight hung a heavily framed canvas, the portrait of a man. It was not hard to recognize. The same constructure of face with jutting brows and deep-set eyes, prognathous, acrocephalic, nose slender enough and straight but slanting backwards as it dropped toward the mouth; and more than a hint of the intensity with which now in spite of the lost eyes you felt that visage gaze at you. But the color had not yet wasted out of the skin when the portrait was painted, and the strength of the man was genial rather than austere.

“Thus,” remarked Janet with a sweep of her arm, “my progenitor. Long since dead. His wife I regret to say I am unable to show you. Shall we lock her out? Come on with me downstairs, I want to dance. Then you will pray and then, we shall have another drink.”

... In the music room I found a skirling lecherous theme in the macabre key of B-minor and accompanied it with corybant arpeggios and drumming chords in an orgiastic rhythm. And Janet was mad and danced, whirling and leaping and posturing, and singing shrilly and calling, mænad through the dim

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halls where the luster of sunset lay a blotch of gangrene on the silence.

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Until, hilarious themselves with drink, Miriam and Ramón returned. Armfuls of packages they unloaded in the kitchen; they brought out boxes of holly and mistletoe, and the Spaniard struggled in with a Christmas tree twice his height, and there were cartons of candles and tinsel and glittering gewgaws to hang on it. But always liquor. A new bottle stood open on the sideboard while Sally, restored temporarily to the manor house and none the worse for her experience, was setting the table. Always liquor, to which with a nervous abandon Miriam applied herself, and Ramón, and Janet.

And I too, to lighten the heaviness of ill omen that would have oppressed me and keep the madness that relieved it, went often to the bottle; and presently when Wilfred, tight-lipped and meditative, came downstairs he found ample reason to seek oblivion.

So, I reflected, three hours after the master has departed the household goes amuck! But I was myself part of this household, its rancors and distractions had inundated me, I tossed in the same whirlpool; and I was delirious myself with release. I gazed at Miriam and remembered the handkerchief

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in my pocket, and I thought: Soon I shall find you alone for a minute and I will confront you, my fine lady, with the evidence of your duplicity. And I returned Ramón, stare for stare and sneer for sneer, all with the ostentatious gesture of Yuletide fellowship. And I laughed from time to time when I looked at Wilfred and dropped some remark with a sarcastic connotation that he still chafing from his imprisonment in my room could not ignore. And at Janet, quite febrile now, I looked and I thought: You, my wanton, are mine and I shall have you.

I have come down to your terms, my fugitive uncertain beloved, and I love you thus and you love me. In the midst of this insanity we shall have together the further madness of our embrace. We shall think no more of Helion, as you prefer, and we shall plan no future. So long as you love me I shall remain here at Mordance Hall. And when eventually your love cools and our companionship becomes tedium, then at last I will leave Mordance Hall in spite of Richard Pride, and go back to society and work and reason and the clarity of day which surely never penetrates through the broadest window of this black house. But for the time being you are mine, you will stay here in my arms though all the stars bawl No!

Belatedly we dined at length, none of us with

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much appetite. Ramón, I observed gloating, devoted himself wryly to Miriam and she seemed exhilarated by his attentions; and as the liquor took possession of him even Wilfred fraternized with them. I went with Janet into the great hall where she carried a taper from table to table and door to door, lighting candles until the place was dizzy with them. Ah, but I was

mad indeed now, with Janet! And I whispered little bewildering seductions to her until she turned to me all fire and took me in her arms ...

From the dining-room came suddenly startling us out of our trance a scuffle and crash and cry, and we hurried in. Miriam, her chair on its back, was standing at one side gazing with a smile, unperturbed, on the scene. Del Prado, his brow slashed open and bleeding down nose and cheek, was picking himself up dazed from the floor; and Hough stood pale and shaking with nervous spasms at the table. He had flung a heavy decanter at the Spaniard. Fortunately the missile struck only a glancing blow.

I went to Del Prado's assistance but he waved aside my proffer of help, collecting his wits. At this Hough turned toward Miriam and I think never in all my life have I seen such wretchedness manifest in a glance, such desperation and appeal and dejection. "I'm sorry, Miriam," he muttered. "I'm ...

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awfully sorry." With his head bent he left the room and we heard him cross the great hall toward the stairs.

"... Wilfred," observed Miriam, "is becoming more and more frantic. He really might have killed you, Ramón. Are you badly hurt?"

"No, no; only a scratch." The Spaniard laughed. "I think he resented my suggestion about Sally. But indeed she would make him an excellent wife! And think of the little ones!" Ramón laid his finger along his nose and burst into cynical mirth.

I watched Miriam. "This very afternoon," I said, "he came to me with all sorts of preposterous accusations. He even threatened me."

"So we locked him up until you people got back," Janet interposed.

If there were any guilt in Miriam's conscience she gave no hint of it, and if any suspicion in Del Prado's mind he did not let it be seen. "You must excuse me a moment, but pray don't let this interrupt the party. Wilfred will sleep off his fury. And I'll have a bulge on my brow, nothing more serious; and even that may correct the unhappy slant. Come, let's drink to Wilfred's bad aim! I'll scold him in the morning."

If before, apprehensive and tense, we had drunk eagerly now it was with thrice that abandon we returned

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to our cups. We moved into the music room and I remember that presently the conversation, led by Ramón who came downstairs with clean linen and his forehead patched with adhesive tape, became more and more lickerish. Janet I remember was Lais. She was mine, mine!...

These things I remembered when I awoke, crapulous, shivering with chill and nerves, lying fully dressed on my bed. My watch had stopped but it was full day. How I had come to my room or when. I could not recall, but such occasional recollection as I could summon of the carousal smote me with shame and mortification. My hand trembled when I lifted my razor. On my desk was a bottle, half full and uncorked. I swallowed a deep drink and presently it warmed and assured me and steadied my nerves. Twice I emptied the glass; and then, eager to see Janet and find in her loveliness reason to forget my dismay, I finished my toilet and went downstairs.

It was half-past eleven by the old clock. Miriam alone was in the dining-room, smoking over her coffee, attired in a yellow negligée, her eyes shadowed. Around her bare throat hung a necklace of heavy carnelian beads and on her finger was a ring with one large carnelian. "Good morning," she said with a smile of profound lassitude. "I was almost prepared to wake you."

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"Am I the last for breakfast?"

"So it would seem." Sally came bringing me coffee on the tinkle of the bell. "Wilfred was up before me and off to the study. He's abject."

"And Janet?"

"If you try araq in your coffee you will find it most stimulating, in the morning.... And quite delicious. Isn't it?... Why, Janet, it appears, didn't wait for us. She and Ramón went away together last night. The garage man brought back the car this morning with a message explaining just that much. Where they were going Janet didn't intimate. How childish of them, such an elopement! I presume ..."

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... She leaned across the table and took my hand in both of hers and held it to her bosom. "Oscar, poor boy, I knew you would be hurt. Wilfred offered to tell you but I asked him not to say a word. I thought perhaps I could make it hurt a little less. Is the pang so terrible? I'm ... sorry!"

Suave and gentle was her manner, her smile that infinitely comforting womanly smile that I had noticed before on occasion and always with surprise that it would be Miriam smiling thus. I made as if

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to withdraw my hand but she clasped it to her, and when I desisted it was as if I had put my face there, child to the mother for consolation.

“Sip your coffee, Oscar; you’ll feel better.” Her gaze was searching and solicitous. “I saw this approaching. Do you believe me now? I tried to warn you. I ... These stars! One can’t believe them when one stops to think. It’s the most primitive superstition. But every now and then something happens that balks analysis. The eclipse, you remember, lasted until midnight.”

“You told me,” I agreed. Her warmth and earnestness shamed me for my doubts. “But I did love Janet!”

All day long we sat there at the table. At intervals in answer to Miriam’s summons Sally would bring fresh coffee. The odorous mingling of liquors suffused me with a tingling narcosis. Distances lost their depth, nothing was at my shoulders, I was quite steady now, at my eyes. Miriam talked.

First she talked to me of Janet, very gently and sympathetically. “She’s a beautiful girl, no doubt of that, Oscar. She is beautiful and a man would find her desirable; she’s young and vivacious and stirring; but she has much to learn about life. Experience may teach her, poor child! College didn’t, and

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I’ve never been able to give her any clear purpose or direction in life. Thus our children. Oh, I believe in delivering woman from the real bondage she has suffered! But girls today don’t understand the ways of their new deliverance. And Janet would never listen to me. Every wind sways her. She was impressed by you, your sincerity and persistence. But Oscar, do you think she really appreciated you?...

“This ... escapade, let’s hope; nothing maiming in it! ... is hard for me to bear, too. I don’t need to tell you that. I love Janet, too; she is my daughter. But she’s gone, and where we can only speculate, and nothing we can say or do for the moment will recover her. Perhaps ... But we must try to help each other! Isn’t it possible for me to do something for you, Oscar? I do appreciate you, really. Don’t you know that? And it would be consolation to me, to see that I was being some consolation to you.”

So for a long time ... while the drugged hours crawled and the day lapsed into a gray overcast evening ... Miriam talked to me about myself. I would look at her. The delicate fabric of her negligée falling easily aside at the throat, the small white hands of exquisite symmetry curving graciously into the wrists, the rich facile lips and the

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luminous brown eyes with the deep shadows beneath. I would think, You are the most beautiful woman in the world.

She spoke of my work. "I've met many artists in my life, Oscar. One judges them first by their honesty, for that is the essence of genuine art. Facility in any medium may be taught; it's a secondary consideration; it indicates simply that the artist has been conscientious and diligent. But the intensity of his conviction and the frankness with which he avows it, the sincerity with which he assumes his part and believes in his vocation and the need of the world for him—that is the essential. I distrust artists who shave too regularly and drive their own cars and have investments and make good husbands. In a sense it's being ashamed of their canonicals. And you——"

"I do shave, Miriam!"

We laughed. "But you haven't any investments and you'd make an intolerable husband!" Once more she was serious. "And I've never met an artist so sincere as you are, Oscar. So ... reverent; it's your word. I've heard you talk or play the piano in a manner that was prayerful."

"I am in earnest.... Yes, I am sincere, Miriam. And sincerity is the essential thing."

"And you have facility. Don't demur that you

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aren't a gifted pianist. I don't mean virtuosity. I mean in composition. You have that rare ability to give your music the feeling of spontaneity so that no one thinks how hard you must have toiled over it. Do you remember the suite of tiny fancies for children that you played for me once? They were so very fresh and joyous and tender! And you've told me something about the cantata. You mustn't allow a girl's caprice to keep you from your dreams! You are superior to the people you come in contact with, you must believe in your own superiority; and Oscar ... I believe in you."

I took her hand now. "Miriam, Miriam, I think you do believe in me! When you talk to me like that, when I am with you, alone with you ... you are so beautiful!... you make me feel indifferent to the loss of everything but yourself." I put my lips to her fingers.

"Oscar, if it helps you, we will be very good friends, we will often be alone together. But it is I that will serve, the beauty in you."

"No, no! The beauty is yours; my part will be to fashion the shadow of it in sound." Now I was glad that Janet had gone, the distraction was removed, my eyes were opened. Now I knew that greatness was in me and that the supremeness of beauty was Miriam. "Are you immortal, is your

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name Diana, benign and adorable? Do you know how I have dreamed of you?

"I dreamed one night that you came when I was ill and sat beside me on my bed, and leaned down and kissed me. And I dreamed once, walking through the woods in a fog, that you stood swaying clad in the mist and smiling at me. And one time I dreamed that I stepped through a door and found myself in a fantastic place where you knelt before a fire of black perfumed logs and made magic. Or were those dreams, Miriam? Were they true? Look at me, Miriam, and tell me."

But while I searched her face the glow of it clouded and her hand slipped out of my clasp and I knew that someone else was about to enter the room. I sat back in my chair and took my cup with fingers that shook with the hurry of blood; and in a moment Hough was in the chair beside me.

... Dinner was served again eventually. The room was almost dark when Sally came in with a candle. Noiselessly she crept about behind us, and presently she lighted a candle in a squat silver holder in front of Miriam. Up the flame leaped, and then it dimmed to a faint yellow pearl of light as if hushed, and then it waxed anew to a steadfast effulgence as if drawing back a curtain from the dark seduction of that saturnine face. And always Miriam

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smoked and sipped, and Hough talked from time to time of this and that, and sometimes I answered a word. For a while I seemed to sleep. But in a

flare of consciousness I became aware of Miriam on her knees beside a prone body.

“Good God!” I muttered shocked into vigilance. “What are you doing?”

She looked at me smiling, her finger warningly on her lips, and then she beckoned. Could it be death? I wondered, growing alive to horror. But Miriam laughed softly, and pushed the inert flesh over on one side, and took from the pocket of Wilfred’s jacket a ring of keys. Then she arose and regarded the body and she spurned it scornfully with her foot. Close around her throat she gathered her negligee, clutching the keys until the knuckles of her small fist shone with a white strained ghastliness. And at last she relaxed, her breath came in a deep pang, she turned impetuously toward the great hall.

“Come with me!” she said.

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Utterly dark, a night of Egyptian blackness, when we shut the door of Mordance Hall behind us and groped across the terrace and set foot on the dead frozen earth. I struck a match. Miriam on my arm, her bare feet thrust in boots and fur coat held with

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one hand across her breast, looked in my eyes for the flicker of that small light and laughed.

“Noël! Noël!” she laughed with an accent that seemed to me the most blasphemous cry I had ever heard. “Come, I’m impatient!”

Her lips’ moist scarlet and the white of her teeth fascinated me. I thought of Gautier’s Clarimonde, I thought of Margarita Hauffe and her victims; and I wondered if these little teeth would be at my throat, and knew I would bare it gladly to them.... The match twitched out. Miriam pulled at my arm. “Come, come, Oscar!”

It was she that led, I followed blind. Surely her fingers and throat and brow were strung with clamoring spider-thread nerves like the wings of a flittermouse that wisps without eyes through a net and never brushes a strand! Now we came out of the woods, I knew by the lapse of the last stony declivity to the level turf; and we were at the door of the study, and she was striving with the key.

Again, at her command, I struck a match. It fluttered and flamed, and we saw that Tod bristling and ominous barred our way. I shrank with an exclamation but Miriam, faltering not a moment, strode forward to him and beat him, dealt him blow after blow with her fists, on muzzle and face. He stiffened in every muscle, that murderous black monster, the

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lips cut back over his tusks. I think he might have sprung at her if she had hesitated once. But fiercer than he again and again Miriam struck, and he dropped cringing to the floor.

Miriam beckoned me on, with an eerie ripple of cachinnation. "Shut the door, it will lock of itself. We are going inside."

She had possessed herself of a candle, now she led on down the long aisle, holding it above her head, posting by instinct or familiar knowledge sure through door and up stair. The candle guttered and smoked in her hand, it was a malign red torch, the shadows cowered back aghast from it; and under the low ceilings our footfalls echoed obscenely profane. Some lodestone drew her with irresistible strength, fateful and ineluctable. Faster and faster we went, and presently Miriam was running with frantic steps holding her coat from her feet in front.

Abruptly she halted, catching one of the steel shelves swollen with dusty files to steady herself, her coat falling open from her heaving bosom; and she laughed then. I could feel the very walls wince with the smart of her hilarity. She tossed the candle to me. Recklessly she fell upon the files, tearing through them, flinging them in twos and threes to the pavement: all so carefully marked with the intricate numeral and letter system of the vast catalogue

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in which Richard Pride compendiated himself and his past. They burst as they dropped, one or two of them envelopes, brittle with age and packed tight with notes in the meticulous chirography I recognized from that of the journal. Across the floor the pages scattered.

These ... the minutes of Richard Pride, so terribly collated from oblivion, so priceless!... drifted under our feet, under the little bitter feet of Miriam as she searched for I knew not what. She trampled them carelessly. Panting I leaned against the shelves and laughed now myself with a very fullness of cynicism at the sacrilege. Together we laughed, until I began

myself to tear at the envelopes and threw them on the floor where the work of Miriam's destruction scuffed dry and dead.

"Here!" Her voice was apocalyptic, a scream on the silence of our sabbat. "Listen, here is another Christmas!"

She read in a griding voice, pausing to gasp for breath or vent another convulsion of sardonic mirth. She read the chronicle of a night two decades gone, when Richard Pride alone with his lover in the adorned and worshipful privacy of their chamber took down her hair, unbound her girdle. He gave me his eyes and I saw Miriam then, every least instant of their love-making, and all her words and all her

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gestures, and all the exquisite crucifixion of love.

The last page fluttered to the floor. For a moment It caught and fixed my gaze, it quivered and shuddered and died beneath Miriam's heel. Then I looked up and I found that the eyes of Miriam possessed me, consuming and draining, half closed as if the violence of her gaze was too annihilating to be loosed direct, as if her very body would pour out of the wide dark brimming eyes. She put her hands on the collar of her coat and threw it back and let it fall from her shoulders to her feet. Then with one wrench she tore her negligée from throat to hem....

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## PART III: RICHARD PRIDE

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## RICHARD PRIDE

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Three weeks into the New Year Richard Pride returned to Mordance Hall. Four days before his return Hough killed himself.

Tod brought news of the sordid ending of the little man to that door of the room high under the eaves where Miriam did her conjurations: the purple-walled, black-floored room with its erotic decoration, its pythoness's tripod and aphrodisiac odors, where Miriam and I would wake at midday from the exhaustion of the night and languidly renew our orisons to Lilith and Diana and all the green baalim her imagination evoked. Tod brought us news. We heard him frantic at our door, galloping down the corridor only to hurry back whining and fretful and impatient. Presently when we could no longer doubt his insistence we followed him.

On the table at which Hough had been sitting, beside the inevitable bottle, lay the book of exercises in self-mastery that he had been studying. There was no confusion in the room to attest the anguish of his last vigil, nothing but the weeklong untidiness that characterized the place. From the chandelier,

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noosed in a loop of clothesrope that would not have sustained the weight of a normal man, swung the dangle of bone that had been my associate. On his cheek was a black moth which arose disturbed at our entrance and fluttered in circles around him.

I touched his thin clenched hand, quite blue, and found it rigid and cold.

But Miriam flung at him, grasped him by the shoulder and jerked, so that a knot gave way and the body tumbled to the carpet; and then she stooped over him frantically, shaking him, even kicking him with her soft slipper. "Wilfred, God damn you, get up!" she cried, beside herself.

For a moment I was unnerved. Then I took her arms and held her back, "Miriam, he's dead! he's been dead a long time!"

The tension melted out of her body. "I'm sorry. I ... couldn't believe it at first." She regained command of herself with a grimace. "I should have predicted it. Wilfred always relied so much on the stars. His faith must have

been sorely tried." She made a face. "Come, I suppose we'll have to notify somebody. But look, Oscar, see if he left any word. He was insane of course, he might have said anything. He was so jealous too of you."

Turning her back to the huddle she drew the cord fast about her negligee and went to the littered table.

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Very carefully now, quite aware of herself, she glanced through the nearest papers, lifting corners to peer between the pages, rearranging everything so that it would seem not to have been disturbed; flecking away patches of dust where her fingers might have left an imprint, handling books and envelopes with her handkerchief.

From the table I went to the trunk, and I recalled, as she fidgeted with the lid, how Janet had studied its contents the evening we explored. But now the lid was locked. Quick with an impulse Miriam was crouching over the body and presently in that same jacket pocket she found Hough's keys. In a minute the lid was up.

I looked myself, and had barely time for a glance before she slammed the thing shut.

"But Miriam!" I ejaculated. "The trunk is full of money!"

She was restoring the keys to the coat pocket. "Sh-h-h-h! We mustn't arouse Mamie, we'll have to break this news cautiously to her, she mustn't be too alarmed. Yes, there is money in the trunk, a few packages of bills; but they're small enough."

"But one doesn't keep money in a trunk!"

"One does sometimes ... if one is mad. I tell you Wilfred was mad! Can you doubt it now? No doubt at all he stole the money in little sums from

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Richard. He wanted me to go away with him." She stood up and glanced once with a quiver of revulsion at the body. "You must go to your room. I'll send Sally there to wake you. Come, quick! I shall lock the door and keep the key until the authorities arrive. It will be easy to explain. I ... I found the damn thing and got excited and yanked it down. Don't forget! We can't have people prying around Mordance Hall. Imagine, if they should catch sight of Richard or get into the study! Come, let's hurry!..."

Still dazed I obeyed, I went to my room and closed the door behind me, feeling a little shock of unfamiliarity as I surveyed it; for not once on any

save an occasional hasty errand had I set foot over the threshold since the delirium of Noël. I dropped into a chair and put my chin in my hands and pressed my fingers to my temples, trying to gather reason out of such ruins.

Richard Pride was coming home, and to what a seethe of shame and confusion! But I had known for days of his coming and that alone had not worried me. In the red ways of Laverna we had laughed at him, Miriam and I; with vervain and talisman she had made magic and I had swung her censer; we had put a portrait of Pride beneath the crimson rug and

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trampled it with obscene bare feet chanting. And it was not entirely the suicide of Wilfred Hough that shocked me so vastly; indeed I should have been startled by that but only to plunge more deeply into the seductions of Miriam. More than anything it was her desperate cry, it was the abuse she loosed upon Hough while she tried to harry and curse the poor lost spirit back into its clay, that astounded and alarmed me.

We had laughed at Hough too, she and I ... while the moon of our douce obliquities waned and was new and waxed to her fullness ... Miriam and I. Why should she be so overwrought at the passing, even in such grisly fashion, of a man she professed to consider wholly contemptible and ludicrous? Yes, yes, as I thought of it I began to see ever more clearly the implication in her cry of that same conspiring which I had suspected between them from the first, and up to the last hour before she had taken possession of me: the visit Janet and I made surreptitiously to Wilfred's room, when we discovered her handkerchief on the table still warm from her palm.

He had failed her, when he took his life. She counted on him for something, and it was a service so vital to her smouldering purposes that his failure

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to perform it moved her for once out of her monstrous poise. But what was it, and why was I kept in ignorance, and did it not menace me? What indeed could it have been!...

When Sally, a jangle and agitation, rapped at my door I made shift to answer. I would be down immediately, I said; and I got up and went to my bathroom to make my toilet. But as I bent over the basin I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror and stopped short in dismay. How haggard I was,

what shadows beneath my eyes, what nervous twitching at my mouth! My hand as I rubbed the stubble on my cheek trembled ... as Hough's had trembled, I thought. Across my face was smeared now the same pallor I had wondered at on his, the same cadaverous lackluster death.

Good God, I thought, what an idea! My nerves are played out, I must not think of such things!... I turned back to my room to sit down for a minute, feeling suddenly weak and nauseated. Then I observed this clutter and desuetude ... the careless heap of papers and books and unanswered letters on the table, the scattered clothes, the dust on pillow and woodwork ... and I saw how very much it resembled the chamber Wilfred Hough had tenanted. And as I gazed in dismay I saw from my own chandelier a figure swing, turn from side to

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side slowly, with a black moth on the cheek ... like Wilfred's body, but this was mine....

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All day long there was coming and going of mumbling functionaries at Mordance Hall: a deputy from the sheriff's office who crept into Miriam's hand and with many a wink and guffaw accepted a drink and a bill; the coroner, superannuated quack who quizzed and scowled and took copious notes about nothing, in particular about myself, and infernally kept confusing Hough and myself and addressing me as the secretary. When it came to notifying relatives we were in a quandary; Hough it would seem had none. And at last under the coroner's grandmotherly clucking care the body was removed, a bunch under a sheet on a stretcher, bundled into an undertaker's truck. I remember how one of the workmen stumbled and nearly dropped his end of the litter, and the hardy expletives the clown vented as he spat tobacco and hitched his pants up around his middle.

By evening they were gone. Quite exhausted and subdued Miriam and I dined alone. We brooded and were long silent, as silent as Tod who crouched at the inglecheek and stared into the fire and yet from

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time to time, as if on a memory or a premonition, bristled a little and glanced over his shoulder rumbling.

... "Saturday Richard will be back," mused Miriam. "He'll be terribly distressed, I'm afraid. Not Wilfred so much as all these people. Yet he did have confidence in Wilfred."

"Rather mistakenly, wouldn't you say? The money weighs on my mind. I thought Wilfred would be capable of many things, but somehow not petty theft. Are you sure he stole it?"

"We found his bank-book. The deposits in that were fairly regular as his salary went. He wouldn't have any opportunity to save three thousand dollars out of what was not accounted for. He was a thrifty boy but his salary seems to have been his only real income."

"Three thousand dollars!"

"Yes. I have it." Miriam smiled, gazing past me. "I didn't mention it to the deputies. In the first place it's mine and in the second place I need it."

"If he stole it from Richard—" I began; but Miriam interrupted me.

"He stole it from me." She meditated. "Perhaps you've never considered, my Oscar, that Mordance Hall is in a sad condition of decay, that the only car we have is an old uncertain relic, that there are

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not half enough servants to keep order in so large a place. I wonder if you have ever considered how much it has cost Richard to do his dreaming? Well, it's cost him what was once an ample fortune, all his family left him and all my family left me. I suppose we aren't poor. Somehow the bills seem to be paid—that was part of Wilfred's work. But the money is gone."

To be sure it was obvious that life at Mordance Hall did not proceed on any lavish scale, but I had had throughout the impression of great resources behind this relatively simple manner of existence.

"Richard has taken my money ... like my dog and my house and my ambition. So ..." —and Miriam sighed and laughed and straightened up in her chair—"... here is some money that belongs to me. But I don't think I shall spend it to repair the house or get another car or more servants.... Oscar..."

"Yes?"

"My Oscar. Do you love me?"

"Yes, Miriam, I love you," I said, thankful that I could mean that much, mindful of the forbodings that dismayed me; and I put my arm around Miriam and kissed her shoulder. "But all this murky evilness depresses me."

“Keep your arm there, I too am depressed. Oh,

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Oscar, I’m hideously depressed by this place and what it represents! I’m so eager to go away somewhere, to quit Mordance Hall forever and try to forget it! I’m filled with terror of greater evil to come ... with Richard.”

Preoccupied, uneasy, I caressed her and then I strolled over to the hearth where Tod did not bother so much as to glance at me. “Let’s not think again of Wilfred, I was saying. “It’s over now and surely there’s nothing more to fear. Richard ...”

But she too arose and followed me, she took my arm and bound it around her waist, holding my hand fast. “Today I made one very great mistake,” she murmured, studying my eyes. “The keys that were in that pocket, I ... I let them go.”

“We can have others fitted.”

“Not for the door in the study. It’s a special lock, one made on Richard’s specifications. Do you remember that we left there on the floor those papers?”

“Miriam!” Now I did comprehend what her great mistake was and the thought of what it might entail struck me with momentary panic. “But ... we must take some precaution!”

“Yes, Oscar, let us take a precaution, at once! Let us do something brave and fine and utterly saving! Let us go away from Mordance Hall together!

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Come, we’ll take the car tonight and escape; well go to New York and tomorrow, day after tomorrow, we’ll be on board ship far on the ocean! We’ll go to Paris, or to Munich, or to Vienna—wherever you please, Oscar, beloved! It is all one to me: only to breathe again an air not from the lungs of a ghost, to be in the sun once more for a little while, to live and love and dream my dreams and escape the horror that lurks here! We will have enough to live very comfortably, and you’ll work and accomplish all that you should accomplish and that you can never hope to accomplish here, and I’ll watch over you and love you and nurse you and make magic for you! Oh, Oscar, to think that tomorrow we can be gone!”

She slipped around in my arms until she was upon my breast, she pressed her mouth to mine and all her body; and then she threw back her head so that the round full exquisite throat was beneath my mouth and the

curve of her bosom my eyes and she laughed and laughed, a passion of exuberance. In a moment she was grave again; earnestly she gazed at me and her words came in a tiding of beseechment.

“Never fear, I won’t ask anything of you, Oscar—not even love if you don’t love me. When you are tired of me you will go and I’ll bid you godspeed and keep content the memory of our time together, glad that it could have been although only for a

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month. And it’s not only for myself that I would go away from Mordance Hall; it’s for you too, Oscar. Think! Here is but madness and hatred and the certainty that when Richard returns he’ll learn about … us. What he’ll do to me I can’t say, and you needn’t worry about that; if I am to stay here I hardly care what happens to me. What he will do to you——”

“Miriam!” As gently as I could and yet determined I parted her arms and freed myself from her love-making. I went back to the table and lighted a cigarette at one of the great tapers and wrung my heart for words to explain what I must say. “I can’t leave Mordance Hall now. Not now, as things are.” I tried to disparage her premonitions. “There will be no discovery, there’s almost no chance of discovery. I know that Richard almost never sets foot in the stacks. He’s engrossed in this new endeavor. And before ever he takes a notion to explore I’ll find some means to … repair the damage.” And I sought to give our love a new aspect. “It is a beautiful, beautiful dream: to go away with you to some isolated place and be at rest there, to love you and in your arms find new symphonies. But are you very sure you’d be happy with me? A very disturbing thing has happened, it has disconcerted us quite, and in

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this condition of repugnance and terror we think first naturally of flight. Escape, and oblivion. If we could only wait and test ourselves and our resolution, and then at last when we are convinced, coldly and unafraid, come to a decision! Wouldn’t that be far wiser? Miriam?”… But I did not tell her that the reason I would not flee with her was dread, not of what Wilfred Hough had done or what Richard Pride might do, but of herself. All over again I was harassed with doubts; they lay against my love and stifled it. I could not look at her, for all her beauty and the knowledge it was

mine, without thinking of the secretary; and I could not think of him without seeing ... myself, dangling....

I expected she would flame into denunciation and recrimination. Or, I thought, she will weep now hysterical tears and I shall have to comfort her. But Miriam neither upbraided me nor wept.

She reflected a moment, standing there alone quite pitifully, drooping, disappointed. Then she came to me again and embraced me. "My Oscar ..." she murmured. "Take me in your arms, I'm very tired, very very tired. Tell me you love me, for that's all I want to hear. Yes, you are right, of course; we will wait. We'll wait until I have proved to you that I do love you, and then we'll go away together. That

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is the end of my life. Will you try to believe me, just for tonight? That is the one purpose and dream I shall have, and I will make you see at last——"

"Miriam, I know you love me!" I cried. "I was wrong, I was suspicious and insane! We will go, tonight, this minute

"No, no," she remonstrated quietly. "We will wait, my Oscar. I think I understand. I have done something, someone has said something, that perturbs you. What it is I can't imagine, but there's no need to tell me. You aren't sure of me and we will wait until you are sure. Only ... for now, my Oscar, say you love me! Am I foolish to beg your love like this? Tell me you love me! Let me be sure of you while I am trying to build up your faith in me!" ...

Then she would talk of this matter no longer, but led me to the piano and asked me to play, and sat on the floor with her back to the bench listening to me and watching me without a word. And that night, wretched with loneliness and regret, tormenting myself with vain remembrances of the tenderness of her, I slept alone in my old room. But waking once in a shiver and sweat from a nightmare of teeth and garroting fingers I found my terror still living, and I could not sleep again until I went softly to my door and threw the lock....

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We had had a week of thaw and sun, the snow had dwindled to an occasional patch of spongeous gray north on a hummock, south in a dell; the shaggy brown grass lay bare to the winds across whole meadows, the brooks ran gurgling and swollen. Now winter fastened upon us once more, with sharp dry cold and lowering sky, smother of snow and rigor of ice.

Richard Pride was already apprised of the suicide of his secretary, when he arrived at Mordance Hall. So Miriam told me when, having brought him home in the car and left him to bathe and dress, she met me fretting with impatience downstairs. Pride had come upon a small obituary of Hough in the newspapers, it seemed. As he was already preparing to return, and as obviously there was nothing to be done, he made no effort to communicate with us.

“He was surprised of course, and the prospect of some delay and inconvenience in his own work vexed him no little. He inquired very closely after you, my Oscar.” Miriam smiled and drew the tips of her fingers across my cheek. “He was reassured to learn that you had remained and gave no indication of discontent.” She laughed, but then seriously she added,

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“He is really very pleased with you and relies on you more than I’ve ever seen him rely on anyone. He relies on you almost as much as I do.” And now she did not laugh at all.

“But ... Janet?”

“Richard was surprised indeed when I told him about Janet. He hadn’t observed, he said, anything that would lead him to suspect either that she was enamored of the Spaniard or that she was unhappy here at Mordance Hall. He hadn’t observed Janet, it would appear, for a dozen years. Word that he had lost her reminded him that he had an actual daughter, in addition to grandfathers and grandmothers. Oscar, he asked me how old she was!” Miriam’s smile now was pungently sardonic. “But it didn’t bother him long. He was so agitated over the departure of Ramón.”

“But Janet may be in distress. Isn’t he going to do anything to find her?”

“He’s much more offended at her for having run away with his dragooner, as he believes, than at his dragooner for having run away with her—a possibility that never enters his mind. Richard is singularly a man of one idea.” ...

At dinner naturally there was no discussion of Janet and Del Prado. But the desperate resolution of Wilfred Hough was the subject of our speculations

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and protestations, and without a pang we went through the motions of deep sympathy. Hough's death had caused me nothing but irritation, and surely Miriam was not stricken; and as for Pride ... It occurred to me, watching him, that even in the short span of his absence Richard Pride had grown perceptibly more remote. Or perhaps, being so close to him before and unable to perceive the process which day by day continuing attained in a fortnight's time a striking expansion, I had not understood the fullness and swiftness of the change that was taking place. He had aged; at least I did not remember that on my first meeting with him his hair was quite so gray and his cheek so deeply sunken. But the change was even more radical than age. What could it be? Withdrawal, in a way. Chestnuts dead in a swamp stand naked denuded of bark, white and spectral and leafless, apparently so corrupt that a whistle of wind will topple them; but scratch the weather-worn surface with a knife and you will find rich-grained firm wood, stout as a shaft of iron. So Richard Pride was dying, seemed dead.... I would look at him and look away, and glance back suddenly chilled with a queer uncertainty whether I had seen him or some sickly presence of an hallucination.... As for Pride I apprehended that the fact of Hough's suicide was

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already out of his mind. All that remained of the emergency was the need of new arrangements at the study.

“It may be presumptuous for me to suggest to an artist work quite so far out of the scope of his art and in every way inferior. To be sure I have had in mind throughout a collaboration with you on a much more intimate basis. But this unfortunate episode makes necessary ...” Pride's voice came thin as from a distance and when he confronted me with his chalk brow it was the brow of dawn confronting me. “I would offer you some compensation financially however, and you would never need fear that I should mistake your real capacities ... which as you know I admire highly ... if you would undertake to fill Wilfred Hough's place for the time being.”

I glanced at Miriam, her eyes were eloquent, she bade me be eager.

"It would never occur to me to make such a suggestion, remember, if there were really much secretarial drudgery at present to be done," Pride was saying. "As I remarked before I went away, I am entering at once on a farther reach of special experiment. It will absorb me for some two months. Yes, yes, by spring I should have completed the study. What is utterly necessary to me during this period is a reliable

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and not incredulous companion, an associate; better, an observer and assistant. The collaboration, Fitzalan, really will interest you."

Miriam's expression was faintly amused.

"Why ... yes, indeed, I should be very happy," I repeated.

"Very well, and ... I shall be profoundly indebted to you. And I'm going to suggest that you plan to live with me for this short period at the study. We will make ourselves thoroughly comfortable; the little negress is a capable cook and can easily take care of us. Not that I can offer you lodging and companionship so pleasant as here at the Hall.... And I presume, my dear Miriam, that I must beg your forgiveness for depriving you of a companionship so grateful as Fitzalan's has been, with his fine gift of music. But it will not be for very long."

Confused with guilt I hastened to stammer my eagerness to be of service. Miriam laughed, but then with impetuous impudence full in the stare of the death's-face she took my hand and held it to her bosom. "Ah, yes, you couldn't deprive me for long of Oscar! He has given me such new vistas with his fine gift of ... music! You'd never believe how close we have grown." ...

There was no procrastination in the attendance of

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Richard Pride. Before I was awake the next morning Sally was at my door to get my bag and give me word, in Pride's most courteous terms, that he would see me at the study at my convenience. It was a crisp white morning, the sun shone like an old nickel in a cold sky, the glazen wind cut one's throat with every inhalation. Going down into the hollow the pathway was a sheet of ice beneath a dusting of dry powdery snow.

Within the stone flanks of the monster ... crouching, gazing eternally into that dropping away of earth and thinning of air where the granite ended, shepherding the hills ... the black beast Tod and the guttural lean little savage Sally, Richard Pride and myself.

“Let us go back briefly over some matters I have touched on and some I’ve tried to explain. It is quite necessary,” says Richard Pride, “in view of the part you are to take in the experiments I am about to begin, that you know precisely what I am doing and why.”

Overnight had come another change in Richard Pride. On his desk parcels, little boxes, a scatter of books and pamphlets, all from his bags which gaped

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half unpacked on the floor beside it; and he himself had put on a loose soft shirt open at the throat and had wrapped a lounging robe about his shoulders, a rather soiled and ragged careless robe with huge pockets. All the old formality was swept away in a breath; and I felt, *The door of the dark chamber has shut behind me, I take his hand, he leads through such darkness as souls must see if they wake.*

“In the beginning I reached a conclusion, perhaps somewhat in advance of its general acceptance by psychologists, which may be defined as the ineradicability of the engram, the neurogram, the memory picture. Every experience an individual has had leaves its own record, complete in all dimensions and details, on his mnemonic apparatus. In this exact sense one never forgets anything. The problem is to find access to that record, a process which has been called ecphorization. Associational paths often too subtle to be retraced lead to it; and it has been found that in dreams, in states of hypnosis and narcosis, as well as in certain morbid states, associational paths previously blocked are suddenly and swiftly cleared. I am going to give you some further attested examples.

“In a clinic at the Salpêtrière a girl was placed in an hypnotic condition. While in this state she recognized and pronounced the name of an associate

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whom she had never met, so far as could be ascertained; and on awakening she herself confirmed that premise. She could no longer recall his name, she protested that she had never seen him before. Investigation however disclosed that at the age of two years the young woman spent some months

in an orphan asylum in which this associate had been serving on the medical staff. She had been removed from the asylum by the man and woman who adopted her and reared in another province, and she had never seen this Dr. Parrot again or heard his name mentioned. The memory however had persisted, true as print: the name of Dr. Parrot, which she had heard the nurses say before she herself could talk more than a babble.

“Another instance is cited by a student of the vast and glamorous subject of dreams, some decades ago. Son of an engineer, he had lived for a few years in his earliest childhood in the town of Trilport, where his father had charge of the construction of a bridge. His contacts with the people of the town were limited and he never returned to Trilport to renew them. One night he dreamed that once again he was a child playing about the lanes of this town. He halted in his play to watch a magnificent individual in shining colorful uniform who strutted past, and filled with admiration he asked the hero who he was. The

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man replied with a smile that he was the bailiff, M. Charles. Next morning the dreamer recalled his dream clearly enough, although he could not identify the episode or the name in anything he remembered out of the mist of his babyhood years at Trilport. But some time later, talking with an old servant of his family’s about them, he told her this dream. She recognized the name, she remembered the bailiff quite clearly; he had often called to see her!

“Cases of like significance are innumerable and the explanation of them is quite generally agreed on by psychologists today. Let us phrase it in a different manner. The entire experience of every individual is conserved in all its details in his mnemonic economy, accessible at any minute if the associational instrument, however subtle, is at hand. My definition may be rather broad in point of my insistence on detail, but I assure you I’m abundantly able to prove it by my own studies.

“Now ... in the course of these studies I became aware of the accumulation of a quantity of memory material which could not be identified, with all the enormous effort I made, by anything in my own experience, even in my most remote childhood. I was curious and began a special and intensive examination of this material. The scope it covered in

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time and space confounded me. But I was so settled in our habitual ways of thought that I took refuge in the explanation these were prodigies of fancy either brought about by the ferment of the libido or flowering in the marshland subconscious into which it is useless to wade.

“An odd experience startled me out of this position. I found in my head one day, idling down a sunny street, a melody which I was musician enough to jot down note for note in my book. It was a sentimental but quite gracious song in the spirit of Mendelssohn and I thought of it often after that. Some three years later I received a number of old albums, files and packages of letters from the effects of a woman who had been a close friend of my grandmother, in their school days, and who had kept in touch with me perennially from my boyhood until her death. Although I had not seen her for twenty years I was a small beneficiary in her will. But the albums and letters were her chief bequest to me and I conned them eagerly. Among them, quaint and tragic, I found a little composition by my grandmother, who studied music at a conservatory located ... and I don’t consider this a coincidence ... at the very point on that sunny street where I had my inspiration, so to speak. The melody of this girlish creation and the melody of my song were identical,

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except for two slight differences. The key my song took form in was that of A-major, while my grandmother had put hers down in G. And the final cadence in my grandmother’s composition was labored and artificial, as if she had discarded the simpler conclusion for one in which she tried to demonstrate her musical sophistication. Quite a student-like gesture!

“My interest in this undifferentiated dereistic material became white-hot. I’ve told you briefly, I believe, one or two other experiments of mine. You may remember my dream of that village which I afterward identified as an actual place in the north of Norway, where an ancestor of mine committed a truly heinous crime. I shall not attempt to produce other instances, although several impressive cases have been cited more or less recently in studies of the subconscious.

“It is important that in time I was compelled to expand my previous definition of experience and memory in such terms as the following: The ancestral experience of every individual is preserved in all its detail in his memory, as well as his own experience, and is equally accessible at any minute if the associational instrument can be found.

“At first, although the deduction was easy to make and argue, I was not prepared to put any definition

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on the scope of this ancestral experience. How far it reached by year and mile, I could not help speculating, but my speculations frightened me; there are some ideas so vast one dares not entertain them. It was a dream of my own so clarified the matter that, willy-nilly and in spite of my terror, I must needs once more amplify my definition.

“I dreamed one night that I was swimming in a broad stagnant lagoon, tropical, covered with eddies of greenish scum, suspiring a thickly, sweetishly odorous vapor beneath the fierce sun. All around me were the coiling figures of gigantic reptiles among which I swam ... without dread or revulsion. It was only in the morning when I awoke and remembered the dream that I felt the normal loathing toward that fetid bath, those slimy neighbors. Indeed I ascribed to my emotional revulsion the very distinctness with which the dream haunted me. I’ve travelled much in tropical countries, you see, and it would be quite easy for me to have come across such a pool in my own explorations. As for the serpents I was quite ready to seek a Freudian interpretation of them as symptomatic. But dutifully I recorded the dream.

“According to my practice too I made drawings, as precisely as I could, of certain fernlike aquatic plant forms which had impressed me in the dream

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and which, being no expert in tropical flora, I could not recognize. As for the serpents I had no exact pictures of them. I remembered their extraordinary proportions and their oval snake-like heads; but in fine quite commonplace, they seemed to me. Skin-bearing rather than scaly....

“You see how sensitive a thing this is, how much more exact than if I had remembered the reptiles more clearly. Indeed I had not the slightest notion of what was the significance of the whole episode. Not even when an acquaintance of mine who is very learned in the flora of certain sections of the Malaysian archipelago sent back to me my drawings, with some amused commentaries and the flat denial that such plants grew. I didn’t realize the significance until, months later, glancing over an article on excavations in limestone beds dating from a later Triassic period of the

Mesozoic age, I found illustrations of a fossilized flora identical with my drawings.

“This period is some millions of years before the earliest trace of anthropoid life, it is far earlier of course than the age of mammals. The reason why I was not molested by the reptiles in my dream, and felt no repugnance toward them, is ... apparent. They were not afraid of me.”

For a moment Richard Pride paused, with that heave of his temples bulging, and the long hands

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creeping over his table, and the blank stare shafting into my inmost mind; and I presume he saw my panic and knew my conclusion. He was mad, no doubt of that, no doubt at all. Yet my very reason challenged me, it could not resist conviction, so confidently did he outline his theory.

... “And so,” he continued, “I have defined the thing once more, demonstrated beyond question, in terms of universes. The entire experience of biological life from its earliest manifestations is conserved and comprised in all its detail in the memory of every individual, and is accessible at any minute if the instrument to reach it can be found.

“And it is my belief, Fitzalan, that I have discovered one of those associational paths which will take me to ... vision. I’ve been struggling for years now to make the first step. Your music has helped me no little, you will hardly believe how much your music has helped, your playing of the folk music. I’ve chosen one definite direction because I’ve found that it is least difficult for me, I’ve been able to thrust some distance already, and I propose now to continue. The will is weak and the imagination recoils still terrified, and I have sought some expedients—” ... and he motioned toward the packages and boxes on his desk ... “—to strengthen the one and soothe the other. During the next few weeks

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many things may happen that will alarm or puzzle you. I ask you only to stand by faithfully and watch, and perhaps on occasion protect me. This ... body of me. It may become from time to time quite helpless.” ...

*The other side of the sun, the thing Tod saw that night in the blizzard, a far closet in the dark chamber, the face of Richard Pride....*

So, our adieus made and our affairs arranged, we begin our adventure, embark on our argosy. We are alone on a sea that never was navigated before, blue indeed but to what shore leading only the wildest surmise can say. Below the horizon has dropped society with all the order of its civilization and the eternal variety of its phases. Every day is the same with us. In the morning our sails are spread and all night long beneath whatever moon they are never reefed. We dismiss all distinction of time, we do not think to number our days, dark and light are one to us, we reckon no week or month.

Now I ascertain what is contained in those parcels which Richard Pride brought back from Quebec and guards so carefully. It is such an expedient as fills me with dismay; it is an assortment of drugs, narcotics,

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sedatives and stimulants to be played against each other. Very carefully Richard Pride has studied their uses and qualities, his friend the psychiatrist has instructed him and has procured them for him; but I am not to know the name of the friend, for I must never appeal to him or mention him in any contingency. Richard Pride sits at his desk and explains them to me, and a gleam from the hearth-fire glints along glass tube and steel filament as he pinches up the loose skin on his belly and inserts the needle.

There is chloroform in the collection. The odor of it sometimes seeps through every hall and closet, and I pace the floor tense with anxiety, and when next Sally comes creeping through the eternal gloom to summon me I perceive raw burns scarring red the sunken plaster cheeks of Richard Pride. Ether is here; it serves on occasion to put Pride to sleep when he is exhausted. There are bottles of paregoric and an abundance of morphine, store of cocaine and a flask of tincture of cannabis indica, and pounds of opium; and there are packages of those curious hashish cigarettes from Mexico. But eventually after some tests Richard Pride finds most suitable the drug hyoscine hydrobromide, the twilight-sleep anesthetic of the obstetrical hospital, which he swallows

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in the powerful hypodermic dose of a hundredth of a grain.

My duty is to be near, incessantly alert; and I am prepared to give him morphine if he comes to the verge of delirium. Gradually day after day he

increases his allowance.

My duty is to be near, but not to stay in the study with him, except on special occasions. There he putters all day muttering, or sits at his desk staring at nothing, or scrawls with desperate perpending an occasional slow page of notes, or sprawls on his couch in a deep slumber in which his stertorous breathing comes to my ear when I listen apprehensive just outside his door. In the study, when he is not in a coma, his companions rather are Tod the dog and Sally the voodoo.

Yes indeed, Sally, for all her superstitious timorousness, is more than reconciled to this new destiny. It would be wrong to say she is over her alarm, for she will slink out of the study sometimes almost hysterical, gibbering. But never does she emerge without some present, a piece of money clenched in her fist, a bit of candy, a string of beads. And there is the vault in the basement to which she has access whenever she pleases, and from which she may take whatever she wants, and to which now and then

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... her courage renewed by her cupidity ... she resorts. Here are stored oddities and precious things from all over the world, pieces gathered during three decades for Richard Pride, in Siam, in Madagascar, in the fermenting marshes of Darien and the jungles of the lower waters of the Magdalena, in Abyssinia and the Punjab. There are dresses here of every color and cloth, and bangles of copper and tin and gold not seldom—bracelets of curious silver and anklets of beaten brass with tinkling bells; there are musical instruments of every kind, and toys, and fans, and headdresses, and grotesque small gods and lewd fat goddesses of black and yellow and green and red. Lured by her greed, shivering in her fright, into this magic cavern she tiptoes with her taper, and in a minute bursts forth frantic but soon to be consoled by her newest treasure. All these as they came, one by one, Richard Pride studied and brooded and dreamed over in the years of his quest, and from each he drained at last the fullest value, and each was put away at last—but labelled and classified and ready to hand should it ever be needed. Now they are all Sally's, on one condition: that whatever she takes she bring to him. Then Richard Pride rouses from his stupor and sits on the floor with her and they look at yellow dress or beaded girdle or amber comb and talk.

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Sally must not be disturbed when she is with Pride. Our cots go unmade, dishes in the small kitchen stand unwashed; but the grotesque play in the shadows of the study must not be interrupted. This Sally knows, and it is more pleasant to chatter with Richard Pride than drudge at household things. It is more pleasant ... until in three days comes an access of terror, and wailing and maunding she flees the monster, cowers behind her bed, clutches her throat and gasps.

“What are you afraid of?” I ask.

She shakes her head simply and points with stiff convulsive fingers toward the study where, if I peer, I can see Richard Pride squatting on the floor by the hearth, rocking back and forth on his heels, staring.... Yes, I am sure he does not hurt her; and I remember his dream of snakes and think the reason for her fear may be ... I dare not face the reason.

Tod too is his companion in the study. For hours at a time Pride will sit beside him, feeling him with his long white fingers. Not a word does he say, but the gaunt hands go here and there across the great beast's body, measure and span forelegs and throat, seek out the little muscles, test the joints, the ears, the paws. Now and then pressing on the soft skin of the dog's jowls he will make him open his mouth

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and hold him thus as long as he can until Tod shakes free, staring at the tusks. Then another day I will see Richard Pride alone, touching himself, testing the joints, seeking the little muscles, twisting his upper lip back over his own teeth: watching himself in a mirror....

Myself, I spend only an occasional hour in the study. Sally will come to summon me, or Richard Pride will come to his door and beckon; or I will hear him calling. “Fitzalan! Fitzalan!” And I go and play, but never now anything but seven native songs which he has indicated. I will play one of them, improvise on it, trail it through queachy rank dissonances, pound it with a monotonous rhythm. In the shadow of his couch he lies, or by the hearth he crouches, drugged, comatose, blinking. When I am tired I leave.

Noon it may be, or two in the morning when I am sleeping spent by this unceasing strain and expectancy, Sally comes to get me. Days pass without ten words of intelligible human conversation between Pride and myself. Then one morning he wakes from twelve hours of slumber and talks to me a little, of indifferent things, never of his experiment. And as the days pass I

become more accustomed to his drugging and my dread of something untoward abates, and there is more room in me now for fascination.

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... *The dark chamber....* What does he see, so deep there, when he sees nothing? Where does he go, with what companions, when he is not with me?... I shall read it all in his face, I think; I shall see his face. And I steal to his door, I cling there half a morning without a twitch or sigh, peering, spell-bound with wonder.

One evening I awake stark from a troubled sleep to become aware of a whimper in the study. As I pass Sally's closet I glance in, her candle is burning, she is lying wide-eyed but helpless with terror, rigid. I too am afraid but even more I am curious. Then I open Richard Pride's door a thin crack and reconnoiter. On his heels in front of the fire he squats, his knuckles on the floor on each side, rocking; but his face is ridged, bulging, agonized and from the thin straight lips comes always that whimper. How I gather my courage I do not know; it is on me the responsibility rests; I must act or nothing will be done.

Stepping slowly between panic and necessity I approach him, speaking to him levelly, quietly. He does not turn or reply, but only when I take his hand and roll back the sleeve he swings toward me that ghastly mask. Then I pinch the skin and spurt into it the needle and press....

Enough morphine surely to put him to sleep!

Still wary, anticipating some manic outburst, I

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fortify myself behind an armchair and open my clasp-knife and wait. The fire leaps and glows; outside a lonely wind huffs through the trees, leans against the panes. Mercifully the drug is swift, the swaying grows perceptibly slower, the ridges of the face relax. With a little crash the body of Richard Pride topples and straightens out on the carpet....

In the morning it is Sally who tells him what I have done. Lucid for the moment gravely he thanks and cautions me. "I can't say, it may have been best. It was thoughtful of you, Fitzalan, and I shall be more confident. But be most discriminating. When it is delirium, protect me; but not when it is not." ...

It was a week before I found an opportunity to go into the stacks.

The day after we moved to the study and Richard Pride began his searching I slipped away and had an hour with Miriam; but after that I saw her rarely, since she never intruded on us and I dared not often leave my post. I did not dare, because it was my duty to watch Richard Pride and be ready to help if it was necessary; and because I must watch him and see that he did not go himself into the

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stacks and discover there the evidence of desecration. But he was engrossed in his new endeavor and made no motion, toward the vault we had profaned; and at last one afternoon while he slept off his drugs I picked up his keys.

I locked the door behind me against pursuit and fled guiltily down the silent aisles. This too was Richard Pride. These chambers were he, a part of him, his flesh and nerves. Surely my trespass must cut like the trespass of a scalpel in his side! I could hear the beat of his heart in pain, here in this body of him, this repository of his dreams and desires and joys. His pulse worried through these rooms and his respiration rustled the broken backs of these envelopes.... Once or twice in the labyrinth I lost my way. He was in Paris now, I ascertained, glancing into a crammed file, and it was the year before our war with Spain. I groped back to the central corridor, and presently I found a spiral stair. Now the years were increasing. It was the new century, and here through a whole shelf lingered the name of a woman, a soft Italian name. Eleven envelopes: they were tantamount to ... one week? One day more likely, with its every minute and hue and circumstance.... And presently I turned into an alcove and found the place I sought.

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Now I worked feverishly, stuffing the scattered pages back indifferently into the envelopes: the reverent pages soiled now, the desiccated paper that had crumbled in Miriam's wanton haste, that bore the print of her boots where laughing she had trod them. Any minute I thought to hear fists pounding on the steel door below, Richard Pride furious to be let in, awakened by his pain, cruel with vengeance hunting me out. I must get the clutter off the floor and into the stacks somehow, I reflected, pausing not

even for one memory of the night Miriam and I had wrought this havoc. Once it is cleared away there will be nothing to quicken his suspicion and inspire him to examine his archives. And if with some casual purpose he should take down this file or that and find in it such confusion, it will be easy for Miriam and myself to deny our complicity. It will be easy, I plotted, perspiring with anxiety and haste, to deflect his suspicion to that quarter toward which it would naturally point. None but Hough and Pride himself ever had access to these chambers....

Back on the shelf I put the last envelope, and I straightened up and wiped my brow. As yet there was no sign of pursuit. I recalled how deep in his narcosis Richard Pride would sink, and I assured myself it would be hours before sluggishly he would stir out of his coma. I pulled back a steel shutter at the

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end of the corridor and the light came in, dispelling my fears and the gloom together.

Shelf on shelf, tier on tier, these memoirs went, all with the elaborate numeral and initial indication which signified Miriam. I took an envelope at random. My fingers left a cancerous blotch on the thick coating of black dust; and mindful of Miriam's precautions that grisly morning in Wilfred's room, I brushed the paper clean with my handkerchief. Inside I found ... nothing epic, nothing confessional, nothing of any critical value in the course of a life. Richard Pride coming into his bedchamber had seen there sleeping his beloved. That was all. And yet for a score of closely written pages Richard Pride described that vision and his reverent wonder at such loveliness thus kept for him, delivered over to him, so serenely trustful: his bride. It was all there, realized, living, the thing and the emotion, amaranthine, deathless, quivering: the simple candid diction quivering marvelously with vitality. I read it through, and then subdued and thoughtful I restored it to its envelope.

*Oblivion, thieving my hours from my hands even as I gaze at them, dropping them silver and gold into his black pocket....* Here was a bright shilling....

Then I loitered down an aisle and turned a corner

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and came to a new cataloguing; and when I investigated an envelope bearing this mark I was not surprised to find that it concerned Janet.

It concerned Janet who was at the time a little girl of four, a dark-haired little girl filled with fairy imaginings, tender, with that unquestioning plenitude of adoration a child will have once for her father. One evening just before bedtime, rolling lazily on her back on the thick rug before the fire, one leg crossed on the other knee and swinging in time, she had been singing to a monotonous refrain of her own one silly phrase; silly, and yet how eloquent!... "Perty daddy donning" ... Pretty daddy darling.... Oh, the naïve generous whole-heartedness of her baby content, the quality of her love that was so utterly without consciousness of self! A child will love you as you love the morning. And you will love your child as you love the future, with infinite potentialities of companionship and laughter and fine things done and shared.

Here too a shilling, hoarded, safe against time....

My fingers were black with dust. I wiped them again on my handkerchief; and I strolled, touched very deeply by this glimpse into the past, meditative and hardly aware of my steps, to the narrow window at the end of the aisle. Outside were hills and the

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naked woods and silence. A cluster of evergreens splashed deep olive against the gray to the left; behind them were oak trees ever golden which a shaft of sunlight escaping through the clouds kindled momentarily into red-orange flame. But silence. There was not the least breath of wind. The trees stood straight and frozen, the smooth even gray of the sky showed no scud of cloud, space itself congealed. Out of the snow and the slaty sky seeped silence like time, like distance.

That was the southeast into which I gazed. Janet was over there. Perhaps half a day's journey, over there, somewhere. God knows where! ... Janet was gone. Ah, yes, and she was beautiful! She was gentle and responsive and desirous of beauty, she was passionate and sensitive and proud and quick; and she was so hopeless. She was ... music before it is fashioned. She might be popular song, so a man might make her. Or she might be in the full sense of the word, wrought and directed with joy and reverence, classic. I was thinking of Schumann and the piano quintet....

Slowly, unreally, a figure moved out of a cloud of trees and swung over a white hillock and down a slope across the clearing toward the cliffs. That

was Miriam, and waking from my reverie I wondered for a minute whither she was going and why. But

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then I remembered that I had not talked to Miriam for a week, and I remembered how we had talked when last I spoke to her....

Janet and Miriam.

But downstairs in his study was Richard Pride. He would not look out of the window to see that lonely figure, he would not be gazing into the southeast. He would be waking presently from his stupor, perhaps he would be sending the little wench to seek me. I closed the shutter and struck a match and crept back, down the stairs and through all that labyrinth, deep in dust, to the steel door, which I locked behind me.

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Lonely as if indeed this sequestered building were a caravel lost on unmeasured seas, we struggled on between fascination and horror.

It was terrifying enough heaven knows before Tod went mad. We shall say mad for lack of a word. Richard Pride thought differently, and to be sure the dog did not die as he must have with rabies. But let us say mad. After that we would hear him howling always, ravening over the hills, beleaguering us in the dark chamber from which he had escaped. He laired, there was evidence to show, in a corner of

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the ruinous foundations under those gigantic spruces where lay the wrystone, beside the coping of the envenomed well. We could catch no glimpse of him, neither could Miriam. But at times he would prowl close to the study and circle around it, baying or whining. That was early in March.

In spite of treasures and money and the feeling of importance Pride fostered in her so slyly, I had not expected Sally to stay so long. Perhaps she would not have stayed if Pride had not fed her, in small portions and quite without her knowledge, cocaine on occasion. I did not know this until later, but probably I would not have interfered had I known. I watched, possessed. One night, waking and hearing frantic laughter from the study, I went stealthily to the door. It was Sally who laughed. Sally, her brown scrawny body glistening in the firelight, was naked. Pride was daubing

streaks of scarlet and green and yellow on her skin, following the long bones of the arms and legs, striping the ribs, articulating the skeleton with fantastic joints....

The day Tod went mad we first heard, Sally and I ... Sally yawning over her dishpan and I in my hourlong nightmare of taut expectant lethargy ... a shrill sudden howl as if the dog were hurt. But then the howling continued with only a gasp now and then, a sharp howl on one tone louder and

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louder until one's skin tingled. I stood transfixed, not daring to interfere with that huge beast. Presently there was a crash, and then pandemonium. Furniture toppled as the dog bashed from end to end of the room, that howl become a snarl; the sound of blows as with a club.

When at last breathless I looked in, around and around the room flung Tod, lurching, blind, hurling himself into table and chair, dashing head first into the walls, the hair stiff on his giant shoulders and his head rigid, his lips drawn back over the yellow tusks, long ropes of brown mucus trailing from his mouth: slaver that spattered high on the door when he butted into it. His eyes strained wide and fixed gleamed with a green glare and could not see. Surely they could not see. Pride himself, armed with a leg wrenched from a broken chair, crouching in the center of the room, bellowing at the dog and swinging terrible blows backed by all the bunching muscles of shoulder and flank as Tod staggered past him, he could not see. He did not see the solid masonry into which he would flounder, or fire or window or door. I watched him hurtle heels over head up on the lounge where Pride made his bed and land there on his side, his muscles rigid in a spasm, howling. Then, as Pride advanced on him, wary and ready to strike, Tod snapped to his feet as if he were all a

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spring, and lunging once more headlong across the floor he went full into one of the long windows and disappeared through it with a shatter of glass.

Through the jagged hole came howling too an idiot wind; it stumbled and rolled on the floor clawing at scraps of paper and rugs. From outdoors Tod's cry came ever more faintly. We watched him plunge into the woods, headed toward the cliffs; no doubt to blunder over the brink, we thought, and drop to his death two hundred feet below on the rocks....

At last I found strength to enter the study. Pride turned toward me, pivoted on his hips without moving his feet, still braced alert for defense, clutching his club with a fist on which one tusk of the dog had ripped a gash from the knuckles half up the forearm. Recognizing me he unbent and tossed his weapon aside. "It's fortunate that he didn't catch the other side of the arm," he said thickly. "He might have severed the artery."

"But the dog was mad!" I exclaimed. "You'll have to have this cared for."

He gazed at the slash, the flesh laid neatly open, and wiped the blood from it with the torn sleeve of his shirt. "No, Tod was not mad. He was afraid of me, I think. He hated me and was afraid. Poor beast!"

I recalled the night of the blizzard when I had

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come upon Tod and Pride and felt the rhythm of Tod's hatred and fear, and I was tempted to speak of it, but halted with the word on my very lips. I too was afraid of Richard Pride, I was afraid to acknowledge that I had overseen something perhaps not intended for anyone to see. So I played nurse to the best of my ability, pouring iodine into the wound, bandaging it with a thick dressing of boric acid ointment.

"I think he may have perceived something," Pride reflected, "that we have not perceived, and would not be able to understand even if we did perceive it. You know how consciousness in a human being not born blind consists almost entirely in vision. It is difficult for us to imagine what existence would be like in terms not of visibility, of color and form and perspective, but merely of smell or indeed of form in a tactile sense. On the other hand the world in which Tod lived was one primarily of odor, his consciousness consisted almost entirely in olfaction. And it may be that there has come to pass some change, there is in this place some new presence, perceptible already in a world of odors, and of such significance that it threw him into panic. The idea interests me. I would have you be quick, Fitzalan, to discern and try to identify any strange odor in the study. Of course ..."

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"The room of course is so thick with ether, so often," I remonstrated, "that one can't distinguish anything else."

“To be sure.” He took his hand from me and looked curiously at the bandage, flexing the wrist and fingers under the wound gauze. “Thank you,” he muttered.

He was trembling slightly now. I remembered how confinement and drugs were wearing down his superb strength. A few beads of sweat stood out on his brow, his temples throbbed but it seemed weakly. His face was seamed and molded in queer new lines: malar bones jutting beneath the eyes, lips drawn down at the corners, and deep furrows from each end to the nostrils giving the mouth, always prominent, a grotesque salience. So struck was I by such evidences of physical deterioration that involuntarily I exclaimed upon them. From his bandaged hand Richard Pride lifted his face toward me ... and he was far away once more, not with me at all, not behind that brow and those eyes.

Slowly he lurched toward his couch where he collapsed, striking his forehead against the wall as he fell and crumpling sidewise. I bent over him. His breath was difficult but fairly regular, his pulse was feeble but not alarmingly so. He had succumbed to the exhaustion of his struggle with Tod, I concluded.

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And all afternoon not an idea I think came into my mind. Mechanically I moved and spoke and at last took nourishment. In my mind was only Tod, and Tod’s delirium, and Richard Pride’s explanation of it. I would startle at the snap of a match or the scuff of Sally’s step in a corner. I was waiting for an odor that somehow must have hands and eyes. A presence here with us, in any shadow it might be, a something impalpable, invisible, noiseless, and yet of what inhuman malevolence!

Toward evening I napped, and I awoke before very late and tossed feverish beneath my blanket, and remembered finally to see if all was well with Pride....

On the side of his couch he sat, his hands drooping over his knees. The bandage from the wounded wrist was partly unwound and hung carelessly to the floor. As I watched he raised the hand with its smear of salve to his distended nostrils....

Not to a crocus, not to a bird of spring, was I behoden for my awakening when finally one afternoon I let myself out of the study by a back door and fled, resolved upon flight indeed, in quest of

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Miriam. It was to a letter which I picked up from Pride's desk and read, ignited by a word or two that struck my eye the first casual glance. It was signed by Wilfred Hough and penned in his indubitable meager hand, addressed quite formally to Richard Pride, and bearing a date which certified it as that last testament Miriam so anxiously had sought, when she could not shake the scared spirit back into the empty jacket.... "Dear Mr. Pride ..."

"Please don't think too harshly of me when you read this. I haven't been the only one to blame and if I have committed treasons against you please try to believe the temptations were beyond my ability to overcome. I will have atoned in some part of my wickedness by sending you this warning; the rest of my atonement is at the mercy of my Maker whom I have denied for many years. I am going to seek His mercy tonight when I have mailed this letter to you, so that when you come back to Mordance Hall you will know at least what is being plotted against you here.

"You have an enemy here who would do anything but kill you and I think she would do that if she didn't want to torture you first. That is your wife Miriam Mordance Pride. Yes, Miriam Pride, your wife, whom I love and who has used me as her dupe and her spy in her machinations against you. I can be frank tonight, I will have to be frank because if there is a God in heaven I could not face Him with a lie in my heart. I'm warning you against her not because I have any interest in you but because I hate

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her for the way she has treated me. I love her and I hate her. She has ruined me and she is trying to ruin you and I'm going to ruin her.

"Five years ago I came to Mordance Hall. At that time you had a secretary that you were keeping only until I could get ready to take his place. You didn't trust him and you were right in distrusting him because he was the paramour of your wife and she was exciting him against you. Didn't you ever see that? She'd make love to him so openly all the house knew it and I can't understand why you never suspected it. You did suspect other things, his thefts and his mockery and his story to the newspapers. You were quite right but it was your wife who inspired him to do everything.

“When he went away your wife began to make love to me. She seduced me with her beauty and made me her slave. She inspired me too to steal from you and the money I’ve stolen you will find in my trunk. It isn’t very much, she was mad at me when I wouldn’t steal more. She made love to me so openly, before your very eyes, that I thought surely you would see it and in my fear of you I planned at one time to kill you. She took delight in making love to me before you. And I would have killed you if this Fitzalan hadn’t come to Mordance Hall and changed her plans.

“She knew you liked him and trusted him and that’s why she began to make love to him. She planned to seduce him and turn him against you for that reason. She is more wicked than the devil himself, there is no end to the wickedness she is capable of. It’s by reason of her very wickedness that I’ve come back to the belief in a good God, because surely such wickedness in a human being

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proves there must be a devil to inspire it. I was so blind in my passion for her that I let her use me as a tool to take him from you.

“This Fitzalan was in love with your daughter Janet. So the first thing your wife did was get rid of her own daughter. She told Miss Janet that the stars threatened her and she should go away. Then she induced the Spaniard to make love to Miss Janet and to elope with her. She paid Del Prado \$1,000 to elope with Miss Janet and part of it was money that I stole from you. What he will do with your daughter now I can’t imagine but he won’t keep her, you can count on that. Yes, and your wife paid the Spaniard a bonus in the same coin she paid me. So she got rid of Miss Janet and cleared the way to this Fitzalan for herself.

“Now she has seduced Fitzalan and I’m crazy. Won’t you believe me? Ask her about the room upstairs that she keeps for her lovers, the room with the purple walls and the golden ceiling, and the couch there with scarlet, pillows and black sheets! Make her take you there and look at it yourself! There are a dozen men who do know about it.

“You haven’t taken that room away from her. Yes, she says you have taken everything away from her. That’s how she wins a man’s sympathy first before corrupting him and sucking his blood. She gets his sympathy and then she reads his horoscope and thus she seduces him. My God, the things I’ve done because your wife told me the stars said this or that!

“So there you are. You don’t need to think I have lost my mind because I haven’t. I’ve lost my soul and I’m taking

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this means of finding it again. I can't say I have any love for you but I'm sorry for you and I'm sorry that I've betrayed you. I don't dare face you and I can't stand seeing your wife and that Fitzalan living together as they do. Forgive me for what I've done and let this warning atone for it to some extent if you can. Believe me and let that room of witchcraft and orgy be my witness.

"You may be a good man but what a fool you are. Forgive me and beware of what is closest to you...."

For a long while, a very long while, in the closet which was my bedroom and only privacy, I sat so consternated that I did not think even to put the letter out of sight from Sally or Pride did either pass my door. Yes, to be sure, Pride had read this epistle. Obviously he had opened it and he must have read it long since. It was this, and no newspaper account, which had apprised him of Hough's suicide. And he had not yet reached for me with those terrible strangling hands. But oh, what could he be contriving in the way of revenge!

Impulsively I thrust the letter in my pocket. Richard Pride was sleeping; he would sleep on if nothing disturbed him for another six hours. Yawning and indolent Sally slouched about the kitchen. I spied once to make sure on the sleeper and his heavy respiration assured me. Back in my room I threw a change of clothes into my bag and fled.

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Through the gully and up the icy slope toward the Hall I ran gasping, but I circled before I came to the edge of the woods and emerged at last in the lane that led to the highroad. There in a clump of green-brown juniper I hid my bag, and then I hurried to the house with terror on my heels, thinking to feel any minute on my shoulder a clutch of cruel talons, thinking to see at every bend of the lane awaiting me that wrathful elemental which had hunted Tod into his demency. As I entered Mordance Hall I halted with surprise. Someone in the music room was playing the piano, most exquisitely, with a gentle harpsichord touch so that the old music sounded infinitely older and quiet and wistful ... older and more wistful than Haydn ever was before.

"But Miriam! I didn't know you played, and so wonderfully!"

Finding the hush of a cadence she looked around, smiling. "It seems to have agitated you to discover the secret. Why should you have known that I ... can play, a little? I never would play for anyone, especially a musician." But then she perceived apparently that my agitation was real and profound, for she arose swiftly and came to me. "What is the matter? What is it, Oscar?"

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"We're going away, now, you and I, my beloved!" I put my arms around her and drew her close, back to my heart across a chasm of weeks I clasped her, out of the muck of lies and shame that Wilfred Hough had spread beneath her feet. The cotquean Hough, crazed by his obscene jealousy! How should I tell her what he had written to Richard Pride? "Miriam, I'm awake now. I've been sick and drugged, but now I'm well. We are going away together, now!"

"But ... something has happened. You look like death itself! What is it, Oscar? Tell me!"

"Miriam ... no wonder Wilfred Hough killed himself. He was too contemptible to live even in his own eyes. He ..."

She leaned away from me a little to study my face. "Dear heart, what lightning has stricken you? Come, sit down, let's play chess, let's——"

"No, we must be very quick. We're going away, Miriam. Now I am begging you to go, to leave Mordance Hall forever, to find some place where you and I together can renew ourselves in health and love and sunshine. Something has happened that makes it impossible for us to stay. It is ... It's this letter. Wilfred wrote it before he hanged himself, sparing the state. It was mailed to Richard Pride in Quebec. I found it on his desk, open."

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She unfolded the letter and glanced at the first sentence. Then ... her breath intaken in a panged spasm hissed through her teeth, and she bit her lip cruelly, and wheeling away from me she went to the window where she read the four pages through to the end in the beat of a pulse; and when she had come to the limp signature she began again, reading more slowly now as if to realize every delirious phrase.

"Without a lie in his heart, but with vengeance there, goes Wilfred to his maker." She mused, her eyes still on the shameful paper which twitched

and shook beneath her gaze. “I wonder, Oscar, which is the blacker: lie or revenge. But Wilfred was a Baptist and his maker a vicious old scold ... if I remember my Leviticus. Wilfred back to his maker, returned for flaws in the workmanship. Will he ever be replaced, do you think?”

“He died with his heart choked with lies, clogged with malevolence, like an old sewer. But oh, my beloved, his mischief is done and we——”

Acerb Miriam interrupted. “What did Richard say?”

“Nothing. He never hinted that he had such a letter. Perhaps it is craftiness, perhaps he is waiting an opportunity.”

“No, he’s not crafty, he’s very direct. You should know him better after these weeks. Probably he

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opened the thing and saw it was from Wilfred and ... But of course he must have read it! Are you sure he read it?”

“It was open on his desk.”

“But he must have said something, Oscar! Don’t deceive me. What did he say?”

A quality harsh and peremptory in her voice and bearing disconcerted me. “Why ... Miriam ...”

“He must have read it. And he knew in advance, you remember, all that I could tell him.”

“Miriam! Let’s not wait for Richard Pride to speak or do anything! There is no good in discussion! We have loved each other secretly; we’ve grown great flowers in the darkness, and now that the light is on them let’s prove that our flowers can endure the light! Let’s seek one fortune together! Now; for Richard is sleeping, any moment he may wake, the little negress will come to find me, the hue will be about us.”

She did not come to me as always before. Idly she took a few steps, and then she dropped to the piano bench, sitting sidewise and gazing at me with an expression that burgeoned with an April of scorn. “No, my Oscar, not now. This is not the time. We will wait, until you are utterly sure of me. We’re distract now, as we were the day Wilfred ... lost his balance. We must wait until I have proved how

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much I ... Lord God of Hosts!” She laughed aloud. Her underlip thrust out, her face went livid. “Upstairs is a pleasant room where, I promise you, you

won't be interrupted. From the middle of the ceiling hangs a chandelier which I'm positive will hold. And I give you my word, I won't come prying and shake you down. This time I think I'll be able to restrain my grief."

Hearing a word is not always sufficient to understanding. I am afraid that presently I tried to laugh as at a jest. "Why Miriam, I ..."

She tossed the letter toward me, it fell to the floor. "You can take that along, my Oscar. All you will need to do is add a postscript. You can say that Mars is in Taurus; that will explain everything and add a touch of color. It will save you much effort."

... "Miriam, what do you mean? Miriam, for God's sake, what do you mean? I wouldn't write such a letter, I didn't come to accuse you of anything, I came to pray your grace! Beloved, don't think I believe the ravings of a lunatic. Are you angry? Why, I would defend you with my life I ..." Then I began to see. "Miriam, is it because ... Tell me that all Wilfred said is not true! Tell me you love me!"

Her mouth twisted. "My patience is becoming exhausted.

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You grow too eager, Oscar, and your eagerness gets in my way. Shall I be very explicit? I'm not angry, but I'm not going to elope with you. If you had told me that Richard Pride leaped up in a fury after reading Wilfred's letter and threatened your life and mine, why, in that case I might have eloped with you. Yes, I would have fled with you!—if I had been sure that Richard would follow us and ... overtake us soon!" She sneered. "Can you understand what that means? It was always so hard for Wilfred to understand. I don't love you, Oscar. I never have loved you and I never could love you. There. Let's leave the explanation at that point. You will think it over and perhaps ... you won't look so vacant, when we meet again, as you do now. You look like a fiddle that's been left outdoors in the rain. I wish you'd go away. I was playing the piano. You'll agree that a musician likes to choose her own audience, or play alone if that audience doesn't choose to come...."

... Dusk was filled with murmur and trickle and stir through all the woods when I went back alone down the little hill and through the gully toward the study. In the gray evening the miracle was coining to pass. Now thawing the surface ice, the crusted snowdrifts, ran with tiny hurrying rivulets that sang each in his delicate voice; and from over

toward the cliffside a waterfall quickening chanted too. The very trees sighed and opened and greeted each other with a soft rustle as the warm wind carried among them its tidings, and turned straightway bustling within their wrinkled jackets to prepare for the belated spring. I could hear them talking excitedly to themselves, the orotund baritone of the young hickories, the chatter of the white birches, the deep unworried time-of-day of the oak trees who had known all along May would not fail them. And walking with my head bent I discerned how all the winter's footprints down the glazed declivity were already melted through to the brown earth, fading into the grass, obliterated.

But here when Janet comes, I thought, the grass will be newly green and spattered with harebell and columbine. When Janet comes.

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... All evening I had not slept, with the palpitation of that hoarse exacerbating little drum in my ears, from the study where hourlong Sally was pounding it, hypnotized herself by the elemental broken rhythm Pride had taught her, squatting cross-legged on the hearth naked and painted and drugged. Now the hearthfire was out and the windows

were open on the morning: the tall windows from floor to ceiling which looked toward the east, the brink of the Palisades and the rolling hills. Earlier Tod had besieged us, he had gone away with the moon, it was nearing four o'clock and soon the birds would be about and the dawn. Behind me Richard Pride was breathing in a raucous quick gasp, asleep or awake I could not say and I could not see in the darkness. He stank.

*The birds will be screeching about and the dawn will be lurching up like a drunken corpse from the sepulchre.*

I had played until my fingers ached iterating the brute song that he whined for. Now I ventured to vary it, remembering a phrase John Powell used in his sardonic rhapsody, a Negro call with an angular leap of an octave. But when I had been extemporizing on that for a while I became at last, ah well I was broken at last with accumulated horror, perhaps I was inspired.

But I found myself with infinite sadness in my heart playing as I had never played before, even in love, even in loneliness. I played first the *Nachtstück* of Schumann's, the familiar one in F that is so sensitive and so infinitely pathetic. Night is like that sometimes and hearts do break with beauty. Night fills your eyes and your ears, you breathe night into

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your body, it is peace. Now what you have been seems far lost and what you ever may be seems nothing of importance. It is enough to have this moment of merging, of infinite dissolution in darkness become peace. They say that when a man's time comes to die he feels no pain, has neither regret nor terror, drifts unfathomably at peace. Oh, perhaps far off in his heart there tolls a little bell like the buoy that heaves on the sea at night and is heard a moment after your ship slides past. And peace is very close to melancholy, and melancholy is darkness. One is never melancholy by day or dreams in a high wind. One time I sat in a small boat on a broad still pond; it drifted through shadows and the reeds brushed softly against the keel; the moon was sinking into a great gnarled pine; but there were no trees over the marsh, only darkness and a few failing stars....

I sat at the piano and my fingers went as they pleased; I could not see them, I did not even feel the smooth ivory of the keys. I was not playing. It was nostalgia that played and I was audience and listened.... Aimless through a few simple chords, modulating.

Then my hands lifted and struck stiff-fingered the wormwood unisons of the Sonata in F-minor, the *Appassionata*, with the cruel morsure of that trill. There is crucifixion on the cross of those unisons, the

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trill the spike in one's palm and foot. Even our God we make cry out with despair and fear on the cross in the night. Now he struggles, the muscles bunching as he tears convulsively from the squared nails in his flesh, the head droops and jerks back with flashes of agony. The draught of vinegar and gall.... Stumbling but furious I played, blundering terribly onward as agony does. The brooding of D-flat major de profundis. Presto! Ah, how those uncontrollable arpeggios crush and crush together, shrilling and rumbling, sky on hell whirling and grinding, the brazen heel of the sun upon you against the granite ... blurred and confounded in chaos with the pedal ... to the dry terrible last crunch of extinction....

Discords jangled. But gazing out of the window and quite unaware now of myself and the thing behind me and the place I saw how the arm of Dawn lay along the horizon. Day knelt there, the hill his prie-Dieu, face bowed and hands clasped above it; he would be looking up soon, he would say Amen and arise.

Now although I had not played it for years I found in my fingers the deathscape of the Polonaise in E-flat major. Going once along the shrouded shores of Bayou Bartholomew, between the live-oaks dripping dank loops and tatters of gray Spanish

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moss, alone at night, this mournful fancy came into my mind. Night is thus solemn, too, often, and lugubrious. The black stretch of unripling Stygian water beneath cypress and drooping willow, the endless reach of it on each side until the poor sick soul cries out in awe. Then close on his shriek thin winds reel ghastly around him. Silence ... and D-flat major again: color of clouds in a black night. Despair.

Balefully the east was flooding with gray. Behind me the gasping labored breath and the reek told me of my listener. I threshed about for some escape from the abyss into which I had fallen and grasped the stark jut of the fugue in D-minor. Marble pillar of a temple at which I flung myself. Thus would go pure thought could it be ever rid of the emotions that weigh it down, shafting. To look too long on Bach is to look too long on a sky filled with stars, to become netted in the fine mist of Coma Berenices. It is bare brain, edged brain, one sees through walls and years. It is the power of the ideal, ice, the atom.... Hard at last I reached and ended on the major triad.

Now cool at last but wasted and forspent I rested my brow on the piano. A drizzle of tepid rain was falling, the smell of it on the breath of wind which now and then faltered through the open windows.

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... I thought of Gottschalk, strange eccentric, sitting at his piano on the brink of the cliff over the West Indian jungle, that time when he came away sated from the court of Brazil and fled to his solitude. And while I was there I grew aware of the voice of Richard Pride which was a whisper and yet seemed calling, from a darkness wide as Chopin saw it and cruel as Beethoven found it.... *Fitzalan! Fitzalan!...*

Outside it was wanning quickly, the sweet rain was bringing the twilight, twilight itself seeped out of that gray weft. There was a curious blotch of white on the terrace beyond the window and I gazed at it, and presently as I gazed the meaning of it, like a deep and pregnant but slurred bass, began to gather definition. And yet I could not stir to go to it, for the voice called and called, as if with terrible loneliness and fear and helplessness, from the shallows of yellow life....

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Now I cannot tell all that Richard Pride said that night, calling. There are no signs to convey such sounds on paper, and there are no sounds to convey the muck that bubbled and steamed, the lusts that

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drooled and the terror that whimpered, behind such sounds. Snarl and whine and slobber, babble of vowels and guttur of aspirates, grunt and hurr. For half an hour I sat as I was beyond all physical feeling and listened and stared always at that leprous fester of white on the terrace, whiter always as the dawn grew gray. What time the voice ceased I do not know, because when finally I got up from my bench and took an uncertain step toward the thing out there I knew it had been silent for a long while.

Yes, I understood what it was, that tragic huddle of white. Brave, baffled, loyal, desperate heart!

I went back into the study and shook Richard Pride by the shoulder until he roused, blinking. "Come, look!" I said, and then I pointed toward the window. He lunged to his feet and came with me. Blindly he followed me and would have blundered on past me when I halted, had I not caught his arm and shook him again, and pointed once more, down, toward Miriam. He stood bending over her. I do not think he perceived or at least recognized the vial clenched in her hand; but presently he took a bit of her delicate nightdress in his fingers and felt of it, watching it, curious. Still holding the silk he lifted his face and stared at the dawn for a moment. Then he turned back toward me ... nostrils dilated,

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drivel at the corners of his mouth, grinning. Then he let go of the cloth and wheeled awkwardly and slouched away into the study.

His arms ... now his back was toward me ... hung loose at his sides, hands falling just below the knees, which were bent out perceptibly so that his heels scuffed the stones as he walked.

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**PART IV: TOD**

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255-256 Blank Pages

## TOD

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Behind me the great door of Mordance Hall creaked to with a slam; and I threw off my hat and light coat and went to the cold hearth where I built myself a little blaze of maple faggots. A patch of some fungous growth was spreading like a dry sore where hearthstone and mantle joined at the right, I perceived; and rising once to scrutinize that forbidding canvas over the mantel I discerned a blotch of mildew on it. Somewhere far off a door blew shut in a grisly draught and the echo came from three sides; and presently a patter of rain in a light wind swept across the loose panes of the skylight which rattled in that breath. How very old indeed this Mordance Hall was! and how deserted!

That afternoon the sun had been warm in a blue sky that drifted over toward sunset with a fume of cirrus cloud beneath which the birds flew low. In a glade filled with little black dogwood trees burdened with pink and white blossoms we returned Miriam to her slumber.

If there is a soul that lives beyond this, it cannot

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see, so much seems certain. It bares its bosom to distance paved with eternity, it is one with the light and does not respond to it. Better to believe that the departing will not carry into the light the memory of such a farewell! The very light itself would be all one pang, would blind us not with glory but with pain. But if it hover over the new bare sepulchre and know, perhaps it will have wisdom to understand and forgive and swinging away forever disremember....

There were four of us at the graveside. Spick and unctuous in his ceremonial black the undertaker, tall and incredibly silent of foot, speaking always in a whisper with a sidelong glance and lifted finger. Yielding to his importunations I glanced once at the face before it was covered over. Here was a Miriam I had never seen before, the cheek smoothed and delicately pink, the lids no longer purple but pale over the mild eyes, the lips red and slightly parted and almost warm: one would have vowed some breath must still find its way into the placid breast, over which folded those exquisite

hands. Asleep she seemed, but not as I had seen her sleep, not inwardly in torment. For a long minute I gazed, and then I drew back with a sigh; and the undertaker smiled with his eyes beneath his impassive visage. A white stock carefully folded and a tall silk hat he wore,

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which when he doffed it was seen to have sheltered a score of long thin black hairs curled across a glistening cranium. And did one drop him the most casual glance he would mutter some string of words ... *The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away* ... and mournfully wag his head.

He stood beside me and we watched the two with spades. Now one of these was a young man with black eyes that glittered and a quick insouciant smile which twisted into a hideous grimace with every stroke of his mattock; a tumbled shock of raven hair and high cheek bones beneath the swart skin. And the other was a bent octogenarian with a white beard who did not smile at all but mumbled and whined with exertion as he tossed the moist earth into the pit, and now and then straightened up laboriously to wipe the sweat from his brow and consult a huge nickel watch. One with his boot and one with his spade they tamped the earth smooth, they crushed a broken violet into the soft loam and a rock beside it, and over it they spread the careful squares of turf....

I had made no effort to bring Richard Pride to the burial, it would have been useless. He listened to me absently in the grotto of his study when I explained what preparations I had arranged. His hands were seamed with dirt and clay had caked in and

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around the finger-nails, and his hair was matted and unkempt. Nor had Tod come to the burial although that morning I had heard him howling, somewhere between me and the study....

I went around the great hall and lighted candles everywhere. Thus it was not so lonely. In the music room I discovered that a jagged square of plaster had fallen from the ceiling and where it had been fell now a drip of water. Upstairs some window must be open to the rain, must have been open carelessly for several days to the spring weather. That would be Miriam's room, I reflected; and I stood a long time in the hall with a taper in my hand, hesitating to go upstairs and enter that room; and finally instead I

went to the kitchen where, finding myself quite famishing, I buttered some crusts and devoured cold chicken from the ice-box.

Mamie was gone, with the painted Sally. They decamped the morning I brought them word of Miriam's death, taking with them all they could carry no doubt in silver and in the shining treasures Sally had looted from the vaults beneath the study. I could not count the loss, but the drawers in the sideboard where the heavy silver of Mordance Hall was kept were wide and disordered when I examined them.

Then I loitered, still confused and with no certainty

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of purpose through my confusion, back into the great hall; and presently I wandered to the music room and sat for a while at the piano. But all around me was such silence as I dared not violate with a chord: a silence in which I could almost hear, as if emboldened by the absence of the mistress, the turning worm trail his slow parade of corruption and decay. Yes. It was as if, in the steady drip of water from the ceiling, in the rustle of curtain and portiere as the wind soughed coldly through, in the crackle of loose tiles beneath my heel as I crossed the hall, in creak and groan and sigh and painful stir, the process of age and dissolution became audible to me, so that I was hushed with awe.

The clock itself had stopped, as if not merely unwound but very old. I could not think here, I could only suffer the monstrous passage of time as if whole ages were unfolding glacial, I could only suffer the vast emptiness. Infinitely retarded my pulse beat on my brain. Behind me and in every shadow seemed spreading like a pool of viscous fluid the green and brown and gray of fungus, of mold-warp and rot. I got to my feet and went again around the hall extinguishing the tall fine tapers; and I looked to the great door, and to the door from the kitchen hall, and then I know not how many doors. With one taper at last I mounted the stairs.

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In a very singular way everything that had been in that house was with it still, within it, mouldering with it. From the chandelier in his room hung Wilfred swaying; strangely his clothes were my clothes, the face was his. And down there in what I saw dark Richard Pride sat at the table lighted with four candles and his hands drifted queerly sensitive and searching as he discoursed in a voice I knew but could not hear on his memories.

Shining my Janet sat beside me on the piano bench and whispered ... *You make me believe* ... while I played, telling her of what bright thread music is woven. I left the darkness populous and sorrowful, I went around the balcony and the glow of my taper lay a pale gold cerement on the darkness.

At my door I paused, and then I went on past and turned a corner and came to the door of Miriam' room, and entered there. A dank wind met me, sent my candle guttering and struggling. The window was open, the gray costly carpet for yards around it was discolored with rain and mildew. There is an old custom upon the death of a person, it varies among many people in small ways, but it is sometimes called "telling the bees." I closed the window, straining at the sash which had swollen with damp in its frame. Then quitting the room I

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paused to touch her dressing table and the brush and toilet things her hands had warmed, her chair where she had sat, her pillow where her beautiful tragic head had slumbered; and I paused too and touched that portrait hanging on the wall, where the sunlight every morning would fall on it.

Behind my own door at last I sat down and took my head in my hands and strove with myself, and presently a little more clear of vision I went to my desk and examined the papers on it. The letters which had not been opened I opened and read; two or three of them were important, one had reference to a quartet of mine that might have been played, had I acknowledged it, at a concert two months previous. The letters I had read but neglected to answer I put together. When I had separated and collected my papers I felt more myself, and I went quietly about my wardrobe now, arranging my linen and brushing my dinner jacket, furred with dust.

There was no hot water, with all the fires burned out in the deserted house. I filled my tub with cold and splashed vigorously in the bath, and I shaved meticulously and completed a careful toilet. Then I dressed again in spite of the hour in fresh linen and pressed suit; and eventually I returned to my desk.

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On some books at one side was the folder in which I carried the manuscript of *Helion*.

Curiously, as one studies creed and breviary of an old religion from which one has been long apostate, relishing the loveliness now as never before, distinguishing the beauty of form and figure from the pomp of pentecostal asseveration, I read it. Yes ... beautiful; strange and mad and beautiful, mad but very close to the heart ... and I knew that I would return to it but with a different quality of faith. So I read through to the last page.

... Now the shadow of the Sunderer lay athwart the bosom of Helion which is the heart of noontide, and Helion drew across her bosom the veil of the daylight and lifted her golden brow and smiled, and Helion said:

Stand by my couch and gaze upon me and wonder, you the Sunderer; I am the flame no blade shall cleave and the water no hand rend. Stand and leer and tell me bangles of false words, yet I see; and string me pearls of spittle and dust, yet I hear your heart how it snarls and whimpers. Stand now a little while when. I shall bid you depart.

But the voice of Elas which is the straight and tall whispered in awe of the Sunderer, and Elas said: He has hunted me from the nearer stars to the uttermost, the point of his stare has pierced my heart and the edge of his glance has left my flanks bleeding and raw. He has whipped me under

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the table of the gods, he has given me sand to eat and lye for my draught; and I am filled with terror lest he perceive me.

And the voice of Elamas which is the breast and the brow lamented in awe of the Sunderer, and Elamas said: Even I listened to the words that dripped from his jowls and I heard and he told me they were life, and many things he taught me to say which I said, but upon my breast they fell and were scorpions and wasps and little vipers. My thighs are stung by his fury and my mouth was parched in his breath, and I was blind and he left me weeping. Hide me lest he perceive and rend me knee from knee!

But the eyes of the Sunderer were inundated with darkness and his malice whined in his belly; wherefore Helion laughed and drew from her bosom the veil of blue and revealed the flame of the flame which is her bosom; and lo, the shadow of the Sunderer withered away. And Helion smiled and said:

Sleep content in my bosom, nay wake in my bosom and arise and dance, for you that were twain are become I that am the flame of the flame and the voice of the noontide and the eye of goodbeing, and the wrath of the Sunderer cannot avail against me. And on the right side are fields of barley and wheat, glean there together; and on the left side are the

wells of dawn, fill there your bucket together; but look that you slay me not nor forget me ever lest the Sunderer follow and seize and destroy you utterly....

On the last page, beneath the careful typewriting of Raymond Laurier, was a pencilled note scarred with hasty dashes:

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“Oscar—Sing this for me—to Richard. And you, keep faith in the dream. Never hope for the fact—but the dream is lovely. I’m sorry I used you—seeing it came to no purpose. Forgive me—for the sake of Helion and ——sing it for me. Miriam....”

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... Janet came in the morning.

When the door slammed as she entered I roused from my meditation at last and went to the balcony to see who could have come. Janet stood in the middle of the hall, taking off her gloves, and our glances met and held to each other, not questioning but dubious, almost afraid. Then she dropped her eyes and went to the couch in front of the dead hearth and sat down. When I reached her I found her shivering with a chill.

“Are you sick, Janet?” I asked. I was quite calm now, putting a fire together for her. I was not surprised, rather soothed with the fulfillment of expectation. She was to return sooner or later, the cry of all this ruin would reach her somewhere surely and she would come back. I had known this.

Empty-minded she replied with a shrug and stared at the flame. “Maybe, I don’t know. Yes, I’m sick. And you ... you’re dry and leathery, like a

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mummy. I couldn’t tell at first whether it was really you there on the balcony or just the skin of you. Puckered. And I ... coiled snakes. I got very tired and could not keep up with them. Very exhausted. I came home to go to bed.”

Her hand was cold and flaccid and trembled weakly in mine. I brought her a drink of whisky and that warmed her. Her eyes were hollow and lack-luster and brooded always inward and her cheeks, until the liquor kindled a hectic red in them, gray as marshwater.

"I think," I said quite gently, "that if you can you should gather your strength and talk to me. Because many things have come to pass since you went away and ... there is no one here now to take care of you. We must be very brave, you and I."

... So I told her the story of these four months of trance and delirium and horror. And at first I took pains to come gradually to my news and prepared her to receive it, but she saw into my circumlocution and found herself what I hesitated to reveal. All through my story she lounged back weak and indifferent; nothing hurt her into alertness. Hough's suicide she commented on with a grimace. Listless and dejected she listened to the narrative of what had gone on in the study and of the tragic exploration of Richard Pride. Then I told her finally of

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that solution which Miriam had taken for her own bitterness and frustration, speaking with all the compassion there was in my heart, but disclosing of my part in her life only the fact that I had come to know and to love her. When I was through with my recital Janet pondered.

"So ..." she murmured, without a tear or gesture, "there's the end of us. You'll go on, I presume, into the sun, Oscar. The nightmare is spent, you will be waking. When are you leaving?"

"Presently, when everything is done. Yes, I shall quit Mordance Hall, it will dissolve into the hills, but I shall remember it."

"The roof fall and the walls crumble. Come." She shook herself together and got up. "We will go find my father."

Into the May noontide we stepped together. First we went to the dogwood glade where the sod, replaced, lay trampled and uneven. And thence, Janet taking my arm and walking slowly and deep in her own preoccupation, we turned toward the study.

The door stood open, and all the windows. Richard Pride was not there.

A rat slithered across the floor from beneath the desk, as we entered. Strewn here and there by the winds were papers, heaping in the corners. But more than winds had contributed to this confusion; books

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had been pulled out of the shelves and thrown carelessly, even mischievously about. A chair was on its back. Piles of clothing indescribably filthy were everywhere. And here were broken dishes, and

here where the rat had been the putrefying remains of some food, there mold and merd. And over all was an odor acrid, mephitic, nauseous that brought sharply to my mind the night I played and Pride dreamed and Miriam came dying to his door. Then I looked farther, and saw that even the door to the stacks hung ajar, and the winds rushed into the dark vaults and alcoves and tugged and fluttered at the files....

But Richard Pride was not there. I went through the rearmost corridors, I thrust a light into those dungeons which had so tempted and terrified Sally; and we called, Janet and I together. There was no response anywhere; he had gone, leaving all this treasure house of his enormous research unguarded and open. A few sheets of paper on the floor bore meaningless scrawls, and some that were not so meaningless, tormented designs that I would have hidden from Janet had she not demanded them.

On the stone pavement of the fireproofed stacks, thus surrendered to rain and wind and every chance, I found Richard Pride's keys, and when at last we left the place I locked the doors carefully. "Here,

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they are yours," I said, giving the keys to Janet.

She took them and glanced at them indifferently, and then she tossed them over her shoulder. "There, they are the wind's. The past is locked back into oblivion. We have no business here."

... Now we went down the lane toward the highroad, for I remembered the ruins beneath the great spruces, and knew that Tod had laired there, and wondered if Pride. In a corner of the stone foundation indeed were a few charred sticks, and ... as we came away a drift of that odor followed us.

Aimlessly we walked on, calling from time to time, and talking of casual things. Over a high meadow and down through a ravine where a brooklet ran gurgling and swollen with the rain of yesterday we walked, and along the ravine until it softened out and flowed into another meadow, walled with huge idly fitted stones ... calling. It brought to my mind the dream I had had and I told Janet about it, the tapestry dream when I stopped at the rubble-stone medieval hutch and raised the hoary cœnobite from his couch. She made no comment but went with head bowed and hand pale on my arm.

But once I drew up abruptly and silenced her, for I perceived on a knoll, behind a cluster of ground cedar, staring at us fixedly, the huge beast Tod. I

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called to him. He turned and trotted away, bristling, looking back over his shoulders with stripped fangs, and now a whine and now a snarl. When I ran to the knoll to watch which way he took, he had disappeared.

When it was near evening, and Janet, leaning more heavily always on my arm and no longer summoning energy enough to echo my call, complained that she could go no farther, we made the best of our way back to Mordance Halt....

Two little boys, come wandering after school through dale and greenwood, stood wondering at the ancient mansion. One of them picked up a stone and threw it at an empty window. But when they descried us amidst the trees they scampered away in a panic....

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How very ill indeed was my companion had escaped me in the bemusement and suspense of our quest. Now I was thrice alarmed to see her droop, so pale and so forspent, to the lounge and lie, eyes shut and breath laboring through the white lips, without a word to me. Again I gave her stimulant and for a moment it revived her, so that she sat up and put her bloodless slender hands toward the

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flame. But in a few minutes she slipped back into that sinister languor.

I smoked, sitting opposite the couch on which she lay, huddling beneath a rug, and watched.

Last night I had thought of Miriam, when I could think at all; and eventually in my chamber I had thought at last of myself. Tonight I thought of Richard Pride, for it struck me as very ominous that we could find no recent revealing trace of him. To be sure he was mad, was what a man calls mad by every token. But how completely he had vanished!

I smoked, watching the poor body of Janet, scarcely stirred by breath or pulse, and I considered all the possibilities. Richard Pride had gone to New York, he had suffered violence, he had pitched over the cliff. But all these suppositions seemed unlikely, and constantly my imagination returned to a picture of him wandering through the woods, prowling.... Presently I crept through the house and every door that was not barred I locked. Then feeling a little more secure I returned to my chair.

On the arm curled under her head Janet's watch ticked faintly. I recalled that there was no other timepiece going in the house, my own watch had stopped. It was upstairs on my table, and I took a candle and went to fetch it. I dropped it in my pocket and turned back toward the stairs; and at

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that moment Tod howled, from just below my window it seemed, so shrilly clear came that unearthly cry.

He was circling the house, quite near it must be, sniffing perhaps at the doors, glaring with those yellow eyes at the lighted windows. Again and again came his howl. As I listened, frozen, it occurred to me that in a way this was not as Tod had howled before. I exclaimed aloud at myself, I cursed myself for a fanciful idiot, and I made a fine gesture of indifference swinging my heels valiantly as I went along the balcony. But once more came the howl, and now in spite of all my curses and resolutions I felt my heart stampede. For in this ghastly ululation there was something more than the madness of a beast. I know that it was not Tod who howled but ... mad man.... Or was it even that? Lycanthropy. Werewolf, with yellow eyes.

Now I recalled that vision of Richard Pride hunched on the side of his cot, lifting to his dilated nostrils the tatter of smeared bandage. Possessed by horror I stood. Fainter and fainter every time until it could no longer be heard that howl wavered lonely and fierce and dumbly nostalgic on the night; and I knew at last that the thing which uttered it had gone away.

Looking over the balustrade, for the moment relieved,

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I saw that Janet still slept heavily. As I came on tiptoe across the tiles, hopeful not to arouse her, I discerned that apparently she had not moved. Nevertheless when, as I passed the foot of the couch, a beam from my taper fell across her averted face, I thought that in a glimpse I saw her eyes wide.... I put my candle down, and bent over her, peering. No, her eyes were closed.

Lord God! I said to myself; I am a fever of nerves and fantasies! It is lonely enough to be sure, and that damned dog's baying is grisly enough; but the time of werewolves is centuries overpast, and loneliness never yet squeezed a gullet.

So once more I fell to smoking, gazing at Janet, until the thought came to me, What if she die?

I was on my feet impulsively and filled with anxiety I pored over her, poor child! It was only exhaustion, I reflected. She is sapped and disheartened by all that has happened to her and by the devastation she found in the home to which she fled for respite. Nevertheless I have never seen mere exhaustion so completely enervate a body. This is not so much exhaustion as it is ... trance, with the color and rigor of death. For a long time I hung there, watching, bewildered with obsessions too vague and fearful and fleeting to be told; and at last the body on which I gazed rippled with a long shudder and

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half turned, supine, and I saw that the eyes were now open indeed.

Open were Janet's eyes but I observed as I regarded them that they saw nothing at all. They saw at least nothing here in this room, neither me nor my chair, nor the walls of Mordance Hall mounting up in this lofty chamber past the twin belvederes of darkness. They were convex mirrors of jet upon which the fire played its ruddy glow. I flung myself on the couch by her side and shook her shoulder, and I called to her, and I kissed her mouth; but neither cry nor kiss nor hand upon her evoked so much as the flutter of one of those strained lids ... fringed with its exquisite long lashes, empurpled, drained.

As cold surely as death her mouth was, quite bluish, and I held back appalled. Now I remembered what I had heard was proper to do, and I put my watch with its crystal close to her lips. When I examined it it was slightly steamed. Life persisted, but it was very feeble, very near extinction. There was no help to be had, no recourse now but hope from the fullness of my love for a miracle.

It was shortly after one o'clock. I laid a fresh log on the fire and returned this time to the couch, and held Janet's hand and caressed it, loving her.

Behind me gaped the great hall. Behind me on my back, emptiness and mystery and terror, creeping

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with incredible corruption. Outside somewhere through the night roamed two beings, Tod and Richard Pride: Tod the dog called Death, the black fierce dog who would look at Janet and look at nothing palpable to him, who followed Pride with a fascination I was beginning to understand; and Richard Pride whose four decades of enormous effort had been ...

successful? All the conviction of his strange theory and grotesque speculation came back to me now. But what a success! What a monstrous success: the door open on those stacks where shelf on shelf were stored the moments of his life, so arduously recovered from oblivion, which he called beautiful, the wind harrying them and sowing amidst them the seeds of mustiness and rot. And Miriam whom he loved slumbered in her dingle, snowed over with fallen petals; and Janet whom he loved lay here piteously wasted. And between servants and secretaries, friends and associates, his estate spent, his home ruinous, his dignity violated and heaped with obscenity.

Janet lay here. Still supine, limp as a plucked flower, the lids drawn back over the dark unseeing eyes, she lay. I tried to find a pulse in her wrist and could distinguish nothing; I put my ear to her bosom and listened ... to earth; and then I held my

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watch again to her lips. This time the crystal came away clear.

Behind me in the shadows toward the door a rush and thud startled me. It was a tapestry come loose from its hangings and fallen to the floor.

Janet was dead....

I dropped her hand at last, finding myself in a violent tremor, and I went into the dining room where I had left the whisky. As I entered a dry scraping rustle along the floor called my attention. There looping green on the carpet was a small snake. It had found some fissure in the stone foundation of the old house, I surmised. Slowly and not at all frightened of me the shuddery thing slid away, under the sideboard, where I did not pursue it. I swallowed a big drink of the liquor, my hand so tremulous I could hardly hold the glass to my mouth.

Janet was dead, so ended my hope. Janet all beauty, poor pitiful Janet lost in her bewilderment, caught up in the deathly distractions of Mordance Hall, sacrificed like a pawn by one who played her chess not unwilling to cheat for the ultimate stake, and notwithstanding ... lost.... Janet was dead, and of what? Of a subtle languor that settled upon her and suffused her and sapped her until, it would seem, her heart grew too tired to continue. But

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languor was not disease! She could not die of that, so young and so vital! Surely not even the dissolution of Mordance Hall could destroy her! She

was not Richard Pride's; she was mine, mine!

With a bizarre premonition I went back into the great hall, I hurried to the couch. She had not moved ... except her lids were closed.

Fascinated I sat by her side and watched until my temples were like to burst with staring, all love of her, telling her over and over again my love. And now at last I forgot utterly the hall and its emptiness and death; for here life was renewing itself. Not saprophytic, the colorless life that creeps in corpse and rotting trunk, the life that is of darkness and death; but life new and fresh and clean, of the sun. Breathless I watched and I saw, perceptible in the course of hours like the rise of the tide, the fluxion of sweet blood into her cheeks and her throat and her brow, and through the fingers of that hand which lay on her bosom. I watched and felt what was by every sense imperceptible, the softening of limb and muscle and every small fiber, as from the very rigor of death; the thaw and melting and dulcimony of May.

Mine, though never yet thus mine before; mine now and mine to be through all the years, going on with the morning, looking not back on the night!

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Janet, my beloved, all beauty and hope and faith and certainty! Janet, my very dearest!...

Above us the dusty panes of the old skylight were paling. Janet, drawing the blanket up above her shoulder with a small sigh, half turned in her sleep and lay close to me.

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Where there are trees there are matins every morning, the choir all sings. But God himself comes very near at noonday, too near for song; for song is the memorial, the communion is in silence.

Together in the morning we resumed our quest, Janet and I, with the wild freshet of matin song at its most blithe. Now she did not gaze only at the path, only inward at confusion, but up with the birds and the sun and the processional of the clouds, and now and then at me.

“Where are we going, Oscar?” she would say. “Oh, I know, it will be away, we will never go back to Mordance Hall; the haunted house with its

ghosts. But I love to hear you say. And every time you tell me I grow stronger, and love you more.”

“On, to the new years,” I would answer. “You and I, my darling. That is our hope: tomorrow, together.”

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“Under the wings of Helion.”

Then I would smile, and maybe sing a little of our music, until at last the trees hushed and the birds and the sun walked with us....

In a path that wound beside a tossing fall, walled thickly with alder and willow and vine and carpeted with great yellow banks of marsh marigold, I discerned ... a warning. I laid my hand on Janet’s arm and halted her, and I explained that I thought best to examine alone this part of the woods, and asked her to wait for me where we had crossed the brook on mossy stones. Smiling she kissed me.

Then I went on and parted the close willows, going by intuition and by that guiding thread of sinister reek which twined between the trees, fetid. Four rods into the thicket my quest came to an end.

Here the brush had been trampled down, the turf scarred and furrowed through to the black loam which bled. But the place had been frequented; a passage had been made through the brush so that a man stooping could creep through it, and there were the ashes of fires and some refuse. Tod perhaps blundered into the place, but dogs do not blunder if not blinded to scent. More likely he had come stalking. I remembered too clearly now, what I had never

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been able to get completely out of my mind, so deeply bitten with horror, that episode in the blizzard. So, let us say, he had come hunting. That would be about when he ceased howling around the manor. Yet, pondering this, I could not be sure that it was Tod howling....

An abrupt ugly list of the hindquarters, a sickening sag in the spine, had been sufficiently finally; but he had been terribly slashed and battered before this curdled his rage. Superb and sinister in life, he was a mortal fiend here dead: the huge black bristling shoulders, the yellow tusks, the small yellow glazed eyes. Tod....

But one last desperate lunge of fury had carried the homicide back upon his conqueror ... his victim too. Naked, still gripping in one mud-caked fist

the thinner end of a knotted cudgel of polished hornbeam, the other fist thrown out and clutching with spread fingers at the grass; prone, thank heaven, the gray hair matted and unshorn draggling to his shoulders, but the head twisted at a wry angle and under one ear the beginning of a rent where a tusk had ripped in. Richard Pride ... his face buried....

Both in that closet of damp shadow, thatched with vines thick as my wrist with scaling bark like shed skin, desquamating, and the interlaced branches

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of small trees whose trunks were green with blotches of lichen. One clammy stem four inches tall drooped with the weight of the colorless flower it bore toward the mossy floor; and here was a nest of ferns, crawling, vermiform....

FINIS

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## About the Author



Leonard Lanson Cline, Jr., was born in Bay City, Michigan, on 11 May 1893. He grew up in Detroit, where his father worked in newspaper advertising. Following his death in 1904, Jessie Forsyth Cline moved to Ann Arbor with her two children, Elizabeth and Leonard. Cline attended a Jesuit high school in Montreal, before matriculating at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in the fall of 1910. He attended college for three years, and left before completing his course in order to marry Louise Smurthwaite. The marriage took place on 28 October 1913. Cline went into newspaper work, in Bay City and Ypsilanti, and finally in Detroit, where he served on the staff of the *Detroit News* from 1916-22, first as a reporter, but later, with increasing responsibilities, as fine arts editor—reviewing music, drama, art, and literature. Cline's first book, *Poems*, was published just after the birth of his daughter, Mary Louise, in September 1914. Cline's son, Leonard III, was born in 1916.

In early 1922, Cline left Detroit to take a position on the *Baltimore Sun* offered to him by H.L. Mencken. Around this time his writings had begun appearing in the most notable publications of his day, including *The Smart Set*, *The American Mercury*, *Scribner's Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic* and others. During this period he also suffered from a serious problem with alcohol. After being divorced by his wife, Cline moved frequently and wrote for a number of newspapers, including the *New York World*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *Chicago Daily News*, and the *New York Herald Tribune*.

His first novel, *God Head*, was on the first list of six books published by the Viking Press in the fall of 1925. Viking also published his second novel, *Listen, Moon!*, in 1926. A play Cline co-authored was produced in late 1926, and at this time he married again. Cline's translation of Thomas Raucat's *The Honorable Picnic* appeared in June 1927, and was followed soon after by his third novel, *The Dark Chamber*. All were representative of Cline's remarkable versatility, and their common poetic style is about the only indication of their mutual authorship.

In the late spring of 1927, Cline's friend Wilfred Irwin came to stay with him at his rural Connecticut house. Irwin worked for a New York insurance brokerage, and came from a distinguished Virginia family. Apparently, Cline and Irwin were fast friends when sober, but they quarreled when drinking. Their first drunken bout left Cline badly beaten by the larger man, Irwin, who spent the night in jail. The next morning Cline paid the fine to have his friend released. A few weeks later, after a long night of drinking, a more serious quarrel left Irwin mortally wounded by Cline's shotgun fire. Irwin was rushed to a hospital, where Cline insisted upon giving a blood transfusion which might save his friend's life.

Irwin died several hours later, after giving an antemortem statement which absolved his friend of guilt. The State of Connecticut, however, charged Cline with first-degree murder and after four days of a highly publicized trial in September 1927, Cline changed his plea to guilty of manslaughter.

He was sentenced to a year in the Tolland, Connecticut, jail, where he reconverted to his youthful Catholicism after having been fiercely atheistic. Cline's second wife deserted him, and in order to raise enough money to save his Connecticut farm, he began writing the pseudonymous "Alan Forsyth" stories for the pulp magazines. For his pseudonym, Cline chose a shortening of his maternal grandfather's name, Oscar Fitzalan Forsyth. Similarly, Cline had chosen the name "Oscar Fitzalan" for the protagonist of *The Dark Chamber*.

Cline was released from jail in July 1928, his sentence shortened by two months for good behavior. Soon after this, he reconciled with his first wife,

and they planned to remarry when Cline could achieve more financial stability. Then, around December 1928, Cline moved again to New York City, taking a job with *Time* magazine. On 15 January 1929, Cline hosted a small party at his Greenwich Village apartment to celebrate the recent sale of a scenario for a play. To one friend he complained of chest pains, and after that night he was seen no more. Five days later he was found dead of heart failure, at the early age of 35. A posthumous poetry collection, *After-Walker*, was published by Viking in 1930.

